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LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Here is the most powerful short story that T. S. Stribling, Pulitzer Prize winner and creator of Professor Poggioli, ever wrote. It deals with the most important sociological problem existing in the United States today. Only last night we heard one of America's most eminent psychologists make the flat statement that it is the mishandling of this problem by the American people — which is to say, by the American government — that is responsible for the most damaging picture which other peoples of the world now have of Americans. We are known — indeed, far worse, we are judged — by our inability for over a century to solve this problem — by our failure as a nation to dispense justice without prejudice — by our fundamental rejection of the principle that all human beings are born free and equal, in dignity and in human rights.

Don't be misled, when you read this story, by the character of Judge John B. Gilroy. He does not speak for Mr. Stribling, or represent Mr. Stribling's sympathies or intellectual wisdom. You will find that the author treats the great American problem realistically — with devastating clarity and equally devastating impartiality.

JUDGE LYNCH

by T. S. STRIBLING

THE EDGED human excitement which swept through the town of Eufala underwent an animal transformation in the kennels of Judge John B. Gilroy and reached the old lawyer's ears in the sudden barking and snarling of his fox hounds.

In his house on the hill the Judge took his nose out of an old leather-bound volume of the State Reports and inquired querulously of Thurston Gilroy, his son and junior partner, what was bothering his dogs.

The younger man surmised absently that it might be only a dog fight.

The Judge thought, sardonically, to himself that this second sapless son of his didn't know the difference between a dog fight and a dog theft. He positively couldn't tell by the timbre, by the burr in the throats of the brutes, whether they were frightened or furious.

The old jurist quirked down his broad-lined mouth, levered himself out of his easy chair, and walked out on the broad front porch of the manor. His law office was in his home, or at least, it was in the rambling structure which had been his home before his second and last wife died. After that, of course, it became just the house where he lived.

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On the open porch, sure enough, he could hear somebody scolding in a low tone, trying to quiet the dogs. These subdued sounds outraged the old man. He turned and called in an undertone through the green jalousie of the French window.

"Thurston, some daggone boy is trying to steal out my houn's again and ruin 'em after rabbits and squirrels!"

The son answered absently out of a case book.

"Well . . . you never hunt anyway, father."

Such lack of perception, such philistinism as this remark conveyed, galled the Judge. The idea of a man allowing a fine pack of fox hounds to be ruined because he didn't use them often! Now his other son, Jim, by his first wife, would have been just as wrought up about the dogs as he was himself. Jim was a man. There was something warm, human, enveloping about him. It was a pity that Jim didn't have a little of Thurston's studiousness, perseverance, and sobriety about him, a little . . . just a little.

During these musings the old man had been striding down the path from the manor to the kennels and now he saw something that caused him to break off his thoughts abruptly and ejaculate:

"Why . . . why . . . I be switched . . . Sam Lannam!"

A smallish man stood in the middle of the kennel yard trying to snap leashes into the rings of the hounds' collars. It was not only surprising, it was sharply embarrassing. The little man was a cousin of the Judge's first wife, Sarah Lannam. To come upon his cousin like this made the Judge feel very awkward indeed. More than that, Sam was a perfectly staid little man and to see him trying to sneak fox hounds out of their kennel was so out of character that it bordered on the unbelievable.

Mr. Lannam must have sensed the Judge's gaze, for he glanced up, then suddenly straightened and stammered in confusion:

"I . . . I . . . why, Jedge . . . I come over to see if I could . . . er . . . borry yore houn's for a while . . . I . . . I mean one or . . . or two of 'em?"

At this the old jurist shifted to indignation.

"Sam Lannam, if anybody had told me a cousin o' mine would have tried to steal out my houn's for a rabbit hunt . . ."

Sam began protesting earnestly, shocked at the charge:

"Why, Jedge, Jedge, don't think that o' me! Why I wouldn't run a rabbit with the youngest pup in yore pack!"

"Hell, squirrels, then," charged the old man.

"Naw, nor squirls neither, Jedge!"

The old lawyer grew more out of patience and challenged: "Look here, don't stand there an' tell me you're fixin' to chase foxes this time o' day!"

"Why-y . . . no . . . no . . . it wasn't foxes, Jedge," admitted Sam reluctantly.

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"Then what in the devil are you after? You ain't taking them out for exercise?"

Sam began stammering,

"N-n-nunno . . . now wait now . . . I tell you, Jedge . . . I tell you. Me and the boys knowed danged well that if you knowed what we was after you wouldn't let us have yore dawgs . . ."

"So you tried to slip 'em out?"

"Yes, daggone it, I was. The boys debbitized me to go because I was kinder kin to ye, an' they figgered if you caught me, you wouldn't do much, an' . . . that's the whole thing."

A flicker of amusement lightened the Judge's wrath.

"Well," he agreed, "I don't suppose I will do much to you, but those who egged you on are accomplices, Sam. I may 'tend to them . . . who are they?"

The little man lifted a hopeless hand.

"Oh, Jedge, you can't possibly 'tend to them!"

"Why can't I?"

"Why, it's ever'body . . . the whole danged town sent me!"

"What! What the devil are you talking about? What does the town want with my houn's?"

"Well . . . if you mus' know . . . Rabbus . . . Blue Pill Rabbus, that black-skinned bootlegger . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well . . . we want to ketch Blue Pill, that's all. He took to the swamp."

The old man stared.

"Good Lord, I hope the whole town ain't that thirsty!"

Lannam was shocked: "Thirsty? Naw, they're mad . . . with whisky legal an' ever'thing and Blue Pill still bootleggin' . . . they're all riled up about it!"

The old lawyer put his hands in his pockets as he always used to do when cross-questioning a witness.

"Sam, you're not only tryin' to steal out my dawgs, you're lyin' to me."

"Why, I'm not lyin' to you!"

"You certainly are. If everybody was against Blue Pill's bootleggin' there wouldn't be anybody for him to bootleg to. And if a lot of you are against it, why don't you let the constable or the sheriff attend to Rabbus? What's the use in the whole town . . ."

Here Lannam broke out angrily,

"By gannies, Constable Jack Henderson did start to attend to him, Jedge, an' he's shot!"

"Who . . . the Negro's shot?"

"Naw, Constable Jack. Blue Pill shot him and took to the swamp!"

"Rabbus shot him when Henderson was trying to arrest him for bootleggin'?"

"Yeh! Yeh, that's right! And after whiskey had got legal too! An' him keep on bootleggin' . . . an' shoot a debbity because he was tryin' to enforce a perfectly reasonable law! Hell, before liquor was legal they would a been some sense to it . . . but durin' them days, Constable Jack never bothered nobody for boot-

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leggin'. You can say that much for Jack Henderson. He was a good man. He laid off the bootleggers durin' prohibition. He tried to work for the best intrusts of the people. Now, when liquor's back, he got shot down for tryin' to enforce a perfectly jest an' reasonable law! It's the dangedest outrage that has been pulled off in this county for years!"

The old lawyer stood staring at this account.

"Why didn't you tell me that at first, Sam Lannam!"

"Why, we knowed . . . you bein' a lawyer . . . we knowed dang well you wouldn't lend yore dawgs to chase down Blue Pill and do to him what we're fixin' to do!"

The Judge looked at Sam intently.

"You mean . . ."

"Shore that's what I mean! They're a hundred men in the swamp now, but they got no houn's, an' they ain't got a chancet in the worl' to jump that buck in all them deer covers!"

The old justice drew himself up. "And you fellows were afraid I wouldn't lend you my houn's?"

"Why, shore . . . you bein' a lawyer!"

"I gad, Sam," quavered the old man, "I think I know the workings of the law as well as you boys do, or better. I've had enough experience with it. I know how a case like that hangs fire and is put off and appealed and reversed and *nolle prossed*. . . . How many dogs do you-all want?"

"Can we get some?"

"How many do you want, I say?" repeated the Judge in an angry tone.

"Why . . . all we can git!"

"Then slip a leash on old Belle there and lead her off. The rest'll follow. You take her along, fast as you can go. I'll step to the house for a gun . . . be there myself."

With profuse thanks Mr. Lannam leashed the dog. Judge Gilroy turned and hurried back up the path to the manor. As he did so, there flickered across his mind an uncomfortable presage of Thurston, his second son.

The Judge knew that when Thurston found this out he would be amazed. He would not only be amazed, he would launch at once into opposition. Thurston was like that, the most butt-headed, argumentative fellow! His second son took after his mother, Mary Thurston, who was the daughter of Judge Harvey L. Thurston of the Supreme Court. Lawyer Gilroy had thought, when Mary gave birth to a son, that the boy ought to make a fine lawyer. Well, he had, but that was absolutely all you could say for him.

Now the Judge wondered if he could slip out a gun and not let Thurston hear him . . . and get with Jim . . . I gad, if he could only get with Jim . . .

The old man entered the manor and involuntarily hushed his steps as he passed the door of the law offices in which Thurston sat reading.

When the old jurist realized he was tiptoeing he was annoyed with himself. He brooded in a kind of vague rebellion that he didn't care what

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Thurston thought, that he had known right from wrong long before Thurston had ever been born. He still knew it and he didn't give a hoot what Thurston thought . . . but he kept on tiptoeing.

When he got through the hall, onto the back porch and into the junk room, he felt a wave of relief.

A jumble of guns, fishing tackle, bridles, saddles, lay before the old man. He picked up some leggings, fixed them hurriedly around his thin shanks, then looked over the shot guns and rifles. An illogical flicker of sportsmanship caused him to choose a heavy repeating rifle. He would fire single bullets. He would give Blue Pill the same chance of life that he would have given to a running buck.

On a shelf he found cartridges. As he fed these shakily into the magazine, he glanced now and then at the door. He finished loading, picked up the gun, and started across the back porch to cut across the backyard to the side gate. Just as he stepped down to the grass, he heard a step in the hallway. The old man's heart gave a little squeeze. He stopped where he was on the grass beside the porch floor and stood looking defiantly at his son who had just stepped out of the door.

The younger man stared at the hastily got-up figure in leggings and hunting coat:

"Why, father . . . you . . . you're not going hunting are you? I thought you were working up that Middleton Coal case?"

"Thurston, I . . ." he was sharply tempted to let the matter go as a simple hunting venture . . . "I'm going into the Middleton case the moment I get back . . ."

The younger man was dumfounded.

"But what's come over you? Leaving a pressing brief to go on a rabbit hunt . . ."

The ex-circuit Judge hesitated, then he said in a monotone:

"Blue Pill Rabbus has killed Constable Jack Henderson."

The younger man stared at this. Presently he asked: "When did it happen?"

"Why, a few minutes ago, I suppose. That was what that racket down at the kennels was about. Sam Lannam had come for my dogs."

"Where is Blue Pill?"

"In the swamp."

"Who-all are after him?"

"Sam said the whole town was after him."

Thurston became uneasy at once: "Look here, if it's a mob, they're not going to just catch that Negro, father, they're going to hang him! You won't be able to stop it!"

A strong impulse went through the old lawyer to say that he would do what he could, that it was his duty as a citizen; but the easy lie which would have supported him temporarily was a distaste in his mouth. He drew a breath:

"I know what they're going to do, Thurston. I'm not trying to stop it." And he started walking toward a side gate that led into an alleyway.

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The second son leaped from the porch and followed.

"Father," he cried in amazement, "you can't mean . . ."

"Yes I do. I mean exactly that," said the older man harshly.

"But you can't! Why, my God, a lawyer . . . a man who has been a Judge . . ."

"Yes, me . . . especially me . . . I have been a Judge. Who, better than I, knows the shillyshallying of the courts! A Negro has a child's mind, Thurston. A trial, the penitentiary . . . even a hanging . . . anything far away is dreamy, unreal to them. But a rope and bullets . . . they see that. It stops 'em!"

The younger man was thunderstruck. "Why, such . . . such anarchy . . . out of you!"

"It's not anarchy, it's law — immediate law."

The two walked on across the backyard together arguing:

"But the effect on the people themselves . . . a town full of executioners . . . a community of hangmen. It's brutalizing! Wait, for God's sake, don't walk on! Let's stop and talk this over!"

The old man made a gesture: "There's nothing to say! The Negro killed a white officer trying to enforce a reasonable law. It wasn't a prohibition law, it was . . . a . . . a sensible license . . . and then shoot a man down!"

The old lawyer vibrated with anger. "But let the court set his punishment!"

Judge Gilroy shook his heavy rifle: "Court hell! His lawyer will want to play smart, make a name; he can always appeal on the score of a prejudiced jury. And the Supreme Court will have to reverse it, because, of course, the jury is prejudiced. The worse the crime, the surer the prejudice, and the oftener the criminals get loose on that technicality. Son, it's better to lynch 'em before a trial than afterwards. It looks more law-abiding!"

The younger man walked on at his wits' end.

"Father, why are you going out of this back gate?"

"I don't want Main Street to see me with . . . this. Not today."

"I see you don't. Isn't that something? A man, who has been a circuit judge ashamed to walk out his front gate!"

"Thurston, I draw down my curtains when I undress, but there is nothing shameful about going to bed."

The young man gave up his indirect attack. "Listen, don't go. I'll join you in getting up a petition to revise our State criminal code so the law will be precise, absolute."

The older man shook his rifle again.

"This is a petition! Every mob that ever formed in America is a petition against lax, technical, unreliable, and corrupt criminal court practice. If courts of justice won't heed these petitions they'll never heed anything you'll ever write!"

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The son followed to the side gate and stopped.

"It's a horrible thing to . . . to murder a man without letting him say a word or make a plea. You don't know why Blue Pill shot the constable. There may have been some reason, some extenuating circumstance . . ."

The old lawyer turned about sharply.

"Suppose it had been Jim who was killed! How would you feel about reason and extenuating circumstances then! Don't you know you would . . ."

The son made a sharp, erasing gesture.

"That's the very point. I would be wild, vengeful, unjust. So will that whole crowd down yonder. But a jury is calm. They hear both sides."

The old man was bayed. He turned with exasperated evenness of voice.

"Listen, that's theory. But it doesn't work. Of course it's unjust. But it's still more unjust to the people when every criminal goes free the moment he comes into a court. If somebody must suffer an injustice, let it be the criminal, not the people at large who have remained obedient to the law until there is no longer any kind of law to obey!"

With this denunciation the old man passed through the side gate into an alley that avoided the heart of town and led into a sassafras field. This, in turn, sloped down to the gloomy fastness of a cypress swamp into which Blue Pill Rabbus had escaped.

An odd feeling went over the Judge as he entered the twilight of the swamp to help lynch a Negro. He was hardly beyond the edge when he heard the distant bell-like baying of his hounds. It came to his ears like a sinister cadenza in music. Now he dropped his rifle in the hook of his elbow, ready for a fast shot, as he had done deer-hunting years before, and moved forward among the huge buttressed trunks and upthrust knees of the cypresses.

As he hurried toward the faint echoing ululation, a sudden suspicion slowed him down. From his knowledge of Negroes in general and of Blue Pill Rabbus in particular, the old lawyer divined that it was not impossible that he should meet the bootlegger wading on a back track trying to steal out of the swamp, while his pursuers beat through the deer coverts.

He also knew that Rabbus would be armed, for he had killed Henderson. In addition to this, Judge Gilroy realized that he was walking into the swamp with the light to his back, while the Negro coming out would be a black object against darkness. It was very likely that Blue Pill would see him before he would see Blue Pill, and a tang of possible danger entered the old jurist's manhunt.

So he moved very slowly and silently. He screwed up his old eyes against the gloom and tried to see as keenly as he had seen in his deer-hunting days. He wished, almost with

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the flesh of his body, that his first son, Jim, were with him. Jim had eyes. Jim had his own early deer-hunting eyes and something more. And his first son was the fastest shot in Eufala. He could give Blue Pill a tenth of a second and still shoot first.

The old Judge got to thinking of his two boys; how his first son was everything that his second son was not. It was as if the two sides of himself had been cleanly divided between his two sons; Thurston, his legal, cool, dispassionate side, and Jim his roistering, hard-drinking, fox-hunting side, which, of course, he, himself, had put by years ago, but which he remembered.

Of a sudden the half nostalgia which had been induced by the distant baying of the hounds was broken into by an irregular roll.

At the gun fire the old man started, gave up his stalking and began wading hastily through the dark red swamp water toward the direction of the noise. Then, on another thought, he knew if the mob actually had found Rabbus, the Negro was dead. It was foolish to hurry. So he slowed down again, and moved ahead, straining his eyes through the aisles of the cypresses and the dull gleam of the watery floor. Then, in the midst of this, by a chance glimpse from the tail of his eye, he saw a ripple, a scroll of little waves, expand from behind the column of a tree.

The old Judge dropped instantly behind the outswung flange of a trunk and stood motionless, rifle ready, watching intently the slight movement of the water.

The little waves quieted to a mirror. For a minute, for two minutes, nothing happened. In the distance the firing rattled again and subsided. The judge thought about this with intensity. He decided the waves he had seen must have come from a muskrat, or a raccoon fishing for minnows. He was on the breath of moving on again when the ripples were repeated. Then he saw they were progressing silently, somewhat athwart his general direction.

The old lawyer stopped breathing to trace the source of the disturbance. After ten seconds he made out a dark object moving among the cypress knees. The old man's tension eased a trifle; he thought the thing was a large hog; then he suspected a small swamp bear; a moment later, from the manner in which it paused and looked about, he knew it was a Negro.

For a moment bewilderment held the old lawyer when he realized that somehow Blue Pill had slipped away and left the mob still firing. Then he recalled that excited men will fire at any movement in a covert, and keep on firing. Then the added puzzle came to him: how had Blue Pill slipped away from the hounds?

As these things flickered through his head, he felt for the hammer of his rifle, cocked it. He leveled it in silence, then suddenly shouted:

"Halt there, Blue Pill! Han's up!"

As the dim figure whirled to run, he fired.

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While the shot echoed amid the twilight swamp, the old man stood behind the flange of a cypress watching the threshing, struggling thing in the water. Presently he waded out with the greatest circumspection, rifle ready, and stood beside the body. He poked it with his rifle barrel with a sudden breath of horror lest it be some other Negro who had hidden in the swamp under the general threat of the mob.

"Blue Pill! Rabbus! Is that you, Rabbus?" he asked in a taut voice.

The man groaned. The Judge reached down and turned his face toward him. With a profound squeeze of relief he recognized the small wrinkled eyes and thick lips of the bootlegger whom he, the Judge himself, had patronized for the last half-dozen years. God, he was glad it was Rabbus!

To the old man's surprise, the failing black man stirred and whispered.

"Ah . . . Ah saw ye . . . Jedge . . . knew it was . . . you. Tell . . . tell Mist' Jim . . . couldn't shoot . . . his daddy . . ." And he hushed whispering.

The old white man stood up and looked at the Negro. Desultory shots continued farther on in the swamp. Then the Judge knew the mob was firing at the place where they thought the murderer was hidden. He cupped his hands buglewise and shouted at the top of his high cracked voice:

"Hey, men! I got him! Ho, fellows, I got Blue Pill!"

Then in the headiest excitement he started wading toward the drumming. He hallooed almost at every tenth step:

"He's not where you-all are! He give you the slip! I got him comin' back!"

The Judge knew his cracked voice could not carry against the noises ahead, but he could not hush.

Presently, a long way off, he saw a hound loping toward him, keeping around the boles of the cypresses for a somewhat dry footing. As it came closer, the old man recognized Belle. As the dog drew nearer, she let out a dismal wail, plashed around the Judge, and fell whimpering at his heels.

The old man was somehow alarmed. It was an extraordinary thing for Belle to do. He looked around at her, snapped his fingers, and said:

"Belle, Belle, what's the matter?"

Then he hurried on to where the mob still hallooed and whooped.

The old lawyer could not understand why Belle had not picked up the black man's scent as he stole away. She should have pointed him in the air. As he stumbled forward, the hound behind him whimpered more and more loudly, and finally stopped on a patch of earth around a cypress trunk. The Judge spent ten seconds trying to get her to follow. He scolded her for cowardice. He wondered if she suddenly had gone gun-shy. Then he waded on more hurriedly than ever toward the loudening noises of the mob.

Suddenly he saw three men with

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guns coming toward him. The three waded homeward with a queer effect of springiness and tension. The old lawyer hallooed and asked what the men were still shooting at.

One of the waders began, "We jest strung up . . ." when the second man said something in a lowered tone. The first man ceased talking. The trio stopped wading and looked at the Judge.

"You-all didn't find Blue Pill, did you?" called the Judge.

"Yeh! Yeh!" cried all three with a queer unanimity, "Yeh, we got him. He's back there . . ." And they veered off through the swamp as if on some common impulse.

At this point a queer notion came into Judge Gilroy's head. He wondered if he could possibly have had an illusion of killing Blue Pill Rabbus eight minutes before.

The old lawyer's heart quickened and he waded on as fast as his shaky legs would move. In his haste he stumbled over cypress knees and almost fell. He held his rifle aloft. He bumped and bruised himself. He was approaching the place of the present shooting: an old deer's stand which he had used in his youth. Then, a long distance from the place, the old man saw, through a gap in the cypresses, a crook-necked figure, a small distant thing, hanging from a limb.

The old lawyer pushed forward, stumbling and slipping with his eyes fixed on this object. He wondered, in his soul, had he really killed Blue Pill. As he went closer he saw twenty or thirty of the mob coming back from the lynching. They were talking in sharp and excited sentences among themselves when the old Judge called in a high wondering voice: "Boys . . . who . . . who was it you . . . strung up?"

At his shout a peculiar silence swept over the group. All the men stopped and stared at the old lawyer. Somebody said in a gray tone:

"That's Judge Gilroy!"

Another voice swore tautly, "He'll know ever' one of us . . . the gran' jury'll . . ."

The old jurist was about to shout out that he was no informer when a third and bolder voice took command and spoke out. It said, "Judge, you see what we've done. The two of them killed Deputy Jack Henderson when all he was doing was trying to enforce the liquor license law. Blue Pill got away. The hounds wouldn't chase him after we strung Jim up. We're not sorry about Jim, because he was drunk and both of 'em killed the constable. You can do what you want to, indict us, sue us for damages. . . . But from now on, Judge, nobody in this county, either white or black, is going to shoot down an officer trying to enforce a fair law and then squirm out of it in the courts."

But the Judge wasn't listening. He was looking at his son . . . and all he could hear was the voice of Sam Lannam, whining:

"I didn't know, Judge, honest I didn't. And Jim, my own kinfolk. I didn't know . . . honest . . ."

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WINNERS OF A THIRD PRIZE: CLAYRE & MICHEL LIPMAN

ABOUT CLAYRE: *The distaff member of this husband-and-wife team "doesn't know how the ink got into her blood." She guesses that it's part-and-parcel of her general creativeness, which includes painting, ceramics, and house-designing. Clayre Lipman's hobbies are prodigious: she collects Californiana, Early American glass, plates, "fancy junk and plain junk"; she operates a part-time approval business in postage stamps with her 14-year-old son, Gene (advt.); she gardens, raises ducks, turkeys, and chickens; she cares for the pets around the house, which include three geese, a pair of Mallard ducks, and a Siamese cat; she handles the publicity for various local clubs and writes a weekly column, "Meet Your Neighbor," for the local newspaper.* [*Editors' Note: And we thought we were busy!*] *Clayre would rather write than eat — which, considering all her hobbies, avocations, duties, and ambitions, must add up to many a skipped meal! And when, pray, does the lady sleep?*

ABOUT MICHEL: *Now, if you think Clayre leads a varied and exciting existence, take a gander at Michel's record: After San Jose State College and Hastings College of Law, Michel hung out a shingle. On the side, he operated a detective agency, specializing in missing persons and insurance frauds. During the war, he worked as a shipfitter, flanger, burner, welder, boilermaker, and riveter; after the war, he was Chief Trial Attorney for Federal Agencies. Now he devotes all his time to free-lance writing (well, nearly all his time: he maintains a law practice in town, just "to keep his hand in"). He would like to squeeze in some woodworking, astronomy, social sciences, medicine, biology, and playing the marimba — he already plays the violin. Michel tells us that he hasn't been bored for a long, long time.* [*Editors' Note: Neither would we! The Lipmans, in addition to "pounding their several typewriters," live on Chuckling Pines Ranch where they built a dam, can their own cherries and berries, chop their own wood, dig out periodically from the deep snow of the Sierras, and perform the hundred-and-one daily chores that keep a farm running. They insist that ranch life is perfect for creative minds. But when, oh, when do they find the time to create? Is Chuckling Pines Ranch an American Shangri-la where each day is a month long?*]

ABOUT THE STORY: *Now that you have had a glimpse of the fabulous Lipmans, you think you know what to expect? Well, don't bet on it . . . because here is the prize-winning story which deals with flying saucers, singing alarm clocks, sea serpents, midget elephants, poltergeists, cosmic*

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rays, space ships, curvature of light, and native rice paper from Nepal — to say nothing of a rosebush bearing blackberries, snow in Liberia, and two glass jars containing a dead man's vital organs. Reader, here is a story that is out of this world. It was born in the San Francisco City Morgue, and it introduces, for the first time in print, a bushy-haired logician with a curiously compelling voice. Reader, meet George Washington Neff, the Chief of the Division of Interplanetary Defense . . .

THE WALKING CORPSE

by CLAYRE & MICHEL LIPMAN

THE body brought into City Morgue appeared to be that of a man in his mid-thirties. Of average height, he had black hair and mustache, and medium-dark complexion. Articles on his person included an ordinary handkerchief, a wallet containing nine ten-dollar bills, a week-old street-car transfer, an empty eyeglass case, a pocket-knife, a letter from a book firm addressed to G. Dorcas, and a receipted bill from the Hotel Clarency, dated four days previously. His suit bore the label of a local tailor.

He had been found floating in the bay by the harbor patrol at 5:35 A.M., and pronounced dead on arrival by Dr. Davenport, night physician, who entered a preliminary report on the blotter. Under "remarks," it was noted that the man seemed to have been in the water about thirty-six hours, and that death apparently was due to drowning. Later, other physicians were to testify that these observations were justified, despite subsequent developments in the case.

Following established routine, the body was placed in a refrigerated locker. The clerk and manager of the Hotel Clarency were summoned, viewed the body, and stated it was G. Dorcas, who had a room at their hotel. He was registered from Downieville, a small town in the northern Sierra foothills. Later that same day, Norris Krag, a medical attendant with a perfect record for reliability for nearly twenty years, removed certain vital organs from G. Dorcas. He placed these in glass containers, labeled each container, and set them in the usual place for Laboratory.

The lab man, Foster Browning, and his assistant, Amy Constantine, worked on the specimens next morning. They skipped lunch, and worked part of the afternoon, double- and triple-checking their incredible findings.

It was then that Browning dictated his now-famous report.

From: Browning,
Chief Laboratory
Technician

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To: E. P. Jameson,
Coroner
Subject: G. Dorcas
Case No. 108-563-M
Findings:

Careful examination of the tissue samples submitted to the laboratory indicate the following:

1. Subject was alive at the time samples were taken; or within a few minutes prior or subsequent thereto; and
2. Samples are not from a human organism.

The case of G. Dorcas quickly assumed international proportions.

As every schoolboy knows — to the infinite annoyance of his elders and alleged betters — the Security Council set up under the United Nations Charter is responsible for international peace and security. The framers anticipated some difficulties along this line, and gave the Council broad powers. Included is Article 29, authorizing it to "*establish subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions.*"

One of the earliest organs — and perhaps most self-effacing so established — is the Division of Interplanetary Defense.

The D.I.D. was established at the United Nations conference at San Francisco during 1945. The Security Council found itself confronted by a bushy-haired individual, not quite forty, whose not unpleasant appearance might have suited a hardware merchant, lawyer, tonic salesman, or violinist. Speaking with a curiously compelling voice, the gentleman — a Mr. George Washington Neff — convinced those assembled that international peace and security involved not only the nations of the world, but the worlds of the universe.

"It would be a tragic blunder," Mr. Neff said, while the members nodded in agreement, "to secure peace on earth, cast away our armaments — and then be attacked by interstellar invaders. While the possibility is remote, perhaps fantastically remote, who among us can say with certainty that it is impossible?"

"Ees true what Meestair Neff says," the Colombian delegate said. "I do not doubt fifty years will see man in interplanetary space. What then of other planets, other worlds?"

"Exactly, and they're liable to come at the moment we least expect." Mr. Neff spread out his organizational charts, procedural data, and administrative patterns. "Now, gentlemen, here is the set-up I have in mind. . . ."

Thus the Division of Interplanetary Defense was one of the first subsidiary organs established under the Charter. Mr. Neff was made Chief, and despite the subsequent uproar over his qualifications, is still Chief.

It seems that Mr. Neff holds no university degrees, and his knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, astrophysics, nuclear fission, chemistry, and military science was gained primarily from newspapers and science-fiction magazines.

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Even more surprising, his sole occupations before his appointment were: (1) two years with the U. S. Army, Pfc, and (2) ten years and eleven months as conductor on the San Francisco, California, street cable-car system. His extraordinary powers of compulsion are due partly to his logical approach, partly to his black bushy eyebrows that meet over horn-rimmed glasses, and partly to his long experience in advising riders to watch out for the curve, please. He is, in fact, an exceptionally ordinary citizen, whose sole qualification for the job he created is a penchant for getting to basic facts, and an ability to make some fairly accurate guesses. But that is enough.

Having been confirmed in his position, Mr. Neff's sole duty is to spot any unnatural phenomena in the observable universe that might indicate the approach or presence of interplanetary visitors.

The heavy technical work is of course done by Mr. Shebley, Professor Curnow, Miss Applegarde, and others who handle the teletypes, radar stations, files, and research facilities. They maintain constant liaison with observatories, weather stations, and military establishments. The information is filtered, and interpreted, and a consolidated report is placed on Mr. Neff's desk every hour or so.

Thus, when the first flying saucer was reported in the Northwest, a D.I.D. observer was there in a jet-propelled plane ten minutes later. D.I.D. men also move in on unusual displays of the aurora borealis, singing alarm clocks, and sea-serpents. They are interested in poltergeists, spontaneous combustions, and hysterical ladies who see little brown men under their beds.

Headquarters are maintained on the old Casa Morena estate outside Glendale. The adobe building has the advantages of spaciousness, privacy, and proximity to Los Angeles, since — statistics show — 91.4% of all unnatural occurrences in the world happen within a 600-mile radius of L.A. This fact has never been publicized by that city's energetic and efficient Chamber of Commerce.

Thousands of events are investigated yearly by the D.I.D. though as yet no concrete evidence of interplanetary visitors has been found. Typical of reports was the San Francisco yogi who first attracted the D.I.D.'s notice with a newspaper statement that he was in touch with Venusians. An invasion was expected hourly, he said, and only the Yogi Kamasutra and his adepts were to be saved. The police disclosed that the Yogi was a well-known con-man named Jake Perry.

"The fact that Mr. Perry is a con-man," Mr. Neff said, "does not necessarily rule out a possible contact." And so Sue Applegarde went to San Francisco, where for $10 she became an Adept. Her subsequent report was terse and factual. "*Forget Venusians. Add $3 to expense account for new set of brass knuckles.*"

Many of the D.I.D.'s investigations

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do not have their lighter sides. A significant increase in cosmic-ray concentration had the staff working day and night. It was one of the rare instances when an actual Interplanetary Alert went out over the Council's channels. You may also remember the giant meteor that landed in eastern Formosa last year. The reports by eyewitnesses gave the D.I.D. some bad hours until scientists from Tokyo could get up into the craggy mountains and confirm that it was actually a meteor and not — as it first appeared — a space-ship.

"'If they come,' Mr. Neff has been quoted as saying, 'we want to know it fast. The whole world's future may be decided a single hour after first contact. We can't afford to pass up any happening that may indicate the coming of persons — or whatever — from Planet X.'"

When the G. Dorcas case broke, Mr. Neff grabbed his ready-packed bag and flew North with Miss Applegarde.

Coroner Jameson called a staff meeting and explained the entire situation to Mr. Neff and his secretary, who took notes. "I don't mind admitting, Mr. Neff, that we're somewhat — ah — disturbed by all this. The behavior of subject Dorcas is — ah — hardly consistent for one in his condition."

Amy Constantine burst out hysterically, "A dead man — who's neither dead nor human! Mr. Browning conducted the tests himself!"

"Oh?" said Mr. Neff.

"Miss Constantine, Mr. Browning, and Mr. Krag are the three employees who actually discovered the — ah — situation," Mr. Jameson explained. "Naturally, we pay no attention to these wild newspaper stories about a living dead man. . . ."

"*I* do," Mr. Neff said. "That's why I'm here."

Norris Krag, the morgue attendant, smiled sparingly. He was a tall, thin, balding man of over fifty. "It comes to this, Mr. Neff: one of the three of us might have pulled this business as a hoax — or the laboratory tests went haywire."

"They did not!" Browning snapped. "We ran the tests three times. We used new bottles of reagents the second and third time. The control numbers were different. There was no possibility of the chemicals being bad. No, sir. Those samples were *not* from a human being! They were either taken from living tissue, or from an organism just dead. They were certainly not from a human body dead thirty-six hours, as Dorcas was."

Coroner Jameson shook his head. "I can't believe it was a hoax. If it was, none of these three would do it. Why should they? They've nothing to gain, and their jobs and reputations to lose."

"Who made the identification of Dorcas?"

"Ramsgate, Mr. Neff. Clerk of the hotel where he lived. The manager of the hotel saw him too."

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Squires, from Homicide, spoke for the first time. "We checked every possibility. There were two or three business letters on Dorcas. A receipted bill from his tailor, Harry Evans. Evans had made him two suits, and Dorcas paid him cash. Twelve brand-new ten-dollar bills. Evans knew nothing about Dorcas. He just came in and ordered two suits made."

"The other letters?" Neff asked.

"One from a Chicago firm. Said they had some of the books he wanted and would try to get the others. Books on mathematics. The third letter was from the Downieville Chamber of Commerce, enclosing a descriptive folder and some literature on the town. Incidentally, he was registed from Downieville, but we could find no trace of his ever having been there."

"How far back could you trace him?"

"Only the last two weeks. The length of time he's been at the Hotel Clarency. He came in, paid a month in advance — with brand-new ten-dollar bills. We found a cigar stand where he bought cigarettes. Always with brand-new ten-dollar bills."

"Phonies?"

"Apparently not. They went through the banks after being deposited. The ones on him were okay. Water-soaked, of course, but new."

"Any change in his pockets?"

"No. Just the nine ten-dollar bills. That was all, Mr. Neff. No social security record. No income tax record. No fingerprint record. The prints in his room at the Hotel Clarency and the ones taken here in the morgue check okay."

"Anything else in his room?"

"The other suit, a few shirts, underwear, brushes, comb; nothing unusual except —" Squires searched in an envelope. "These pieces of paper. They'd been thrown in the wastebasket and carried out by the maid, but we recovered them from the trash can."

Mr. Neff studied the figures on the sheets of paper. "Algebra?"

"We asked Professor Carmichael, over at Cal. He says they have something to do with the curvature of light, but it's kinda cockeyed. He explained what was wrong, but I didn't get it."

"And the paper?"

"You got us there, Mr. Neff. It wasn't made by any regular manufacturer. One fellow we consulted says it looks like a kind of native rice paper made in Nepal, but it's hard to tell because they never make two batches alike."

"You've checked Missing Persons?"

"No record of anyone looking for him, either under the name of Dorcas, or by description. We figured he might be using an alias."

"In other words, G. Dorcas appeared out of nowhere about two weeks ago, and registered at the Hotel Clarency. As though he'd had no earthly existence before that date."

Squires frowned. "I wouldn't say that, but he sure didn't leave much of a trail before that."

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"Have you had re-checks made on Mr. Browning's lab work, Mr. Jameson?" Neff asked.

"We couldn't."

"Because," Amy Constantine cried out, "*Mr. Dorcas got up last night and walked out of the morgue carrying two glass jars full of his own organs away with him!*"

"It's fantastic enough to be extraplanetary," Mr. Neff said to Miss Applegarde, as they finished dinner at the Plaza. "What bothers me is the secrecy of this Dorcas fellow's operations. Lives at a quiet hotel, speaks perfect English, studies a type of mathematics that ties in with space travel, and but for the accident of his falling or being thrown into the bay, we'd never have known of his existence."

"We wouldn't know then," Sue said, "if he hadn't taken a curious dislike to City Morgue. Are you going to send out an Alert?"

"I may be tempting fate, but I think we'll hold off a day or so. These General Staffs all think we're crazy. Especially since we've alerted before and nothing happened. We might find ourselves in the position of the shepherd boy who cried 'wolf' once too often."

"You'd better do it anyway. Then if anything *does* happen, and they aren't ready, it won't be our fault."

"In that case it won't matter."

"Assuming that visitors from Planet X would be hostile. They may not be."

"Maybe not actually hostile. But they'd probably be far superior to us in intellect and military strength. They could more or less politely brush us aside, much as we did the Indians in the early days." Mr. Neff sighed.

"No doubt." There was no conviction in her remark. "How do you explain this fellow's running around without his innards?"

"A human couldn't — but another form of life might. There are bacteria, for example, found in a kind of suspended animation in coal, where they've been for hundreds of millions of years, and subsequently have revived."

"If it was up to me, I'd get out that Alert, Mr. George Washington Neff!"

"We have three, and only three, possibilities. An error by the technicians. Or some marvelous flim-flam by persons unknown for reasons unknown. Or —"

"A man from Planet X."

"Or men," Mr. Neff added gravely. "There could be hundreds of G. Dorcases quietly living around us, and how would we ever know?"

For the first time since she'd been with the Division of Interplanetary Defense, Miss Applegarde shuddered.

The officer came in as they were finishing their dessert. "Got a flash from Inspector Squires," he said. "Wants me to bring you right over to the Coroner's. Dorcas again."

They found Coroner Jameson with an extremely agitated young man.

"Henry Ramsgate. Clerk at the

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Hotel Clarency. Listen to this, Mr. Neff — it's unbelievable!"

"It's true, I swear it, Doctor Jameson!" Ramsgate wiped his palms with a handkerchief. "Just an hour ago. Miss Dimmick — 401, that is — phoned the desk. I'd come on shift just a few minutes before. She said a man was up there, claiming 401 was his room, and demanding she get out. Well, I went up. *It was Mr. Dorcas!*"

"You're sure?"

"Positive! He was having a fit because we'd rented his room when he was paid up for another week. Said it was a fine way to treat a guest. Demanded another room, if he couldn't have 401. Well, as I told you, Doctor, after I'd seen Mr. Dorcas in his c-c-coffin the day before — I *think* I said we didn't have any more rooms. . . ."

"Was he carrying anything?"

"He had a large paper bag, and I could hear a kind of clinking noise — you know, like glass makes. Well — Dorcas, he says he's going to file a complaint with the Hotel Association and the Better Business Bureau. Then he goes to the automatic elevator and rides down."

"Didn't you try to stop him?" Jameson asked.

"Who, me?" Ramsgate turned white. "Not me! I ran to the end of the hall and down the stairs, and when I get to the lobby, there's Mr. Simon, the manager, lookin' like he'd seen a ghost, and there's Mr. Dorcas, just disappearin' through the revolving doors. Mr. Simon asked me, did I see it, too? And I says yes, and tells him what happened upstairs. Then I think, maybe he's left clues — fingerprints or something — in the elevator; so I run the car into the basement, and out of service. I figured he must of had to push the number one button, anyway, so I didn't touch that."

"Splendid! We'll get a man on it right away. Miss Applegarde, ask Squires to detail plainclothesmen to both the Hotel Association and Better Business Bureau. Have a watch put on their telephone lines, so if he calls them, or comes in, they'll get a chance to nail him."

"On what charge, Mr. Neff?" Sue Applegarde asked sweetly. "You can't arrest a man, especially a dead one, unless he's done something wrong. It's in the Constitution, I think."

Jameson stepped forward. "You mean to say it isn't illegal for a dead man to go running around with a couple of jars full of —"

"Jars!" Mr. Neff exclaimed. "Now, that's an idea. The jars belong to the city. Dorcas took 'em; so technically he's committed theft."

"I'll have to swear out a warrant, I guess," the Coroner said. "Let you know the minute we pick him up."

Mr. Neff stopped at the laboratory. Foster Browning was working alone. Amy Constantine, he learned, was at home with a supply of sedatives.

"Just wanted to ask you what you thought about this man-from-Mars theory, Mr. Browning. Your assistant

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seemed to think there was something to it."

The tall redhead blinked watery blue eyes behind his thick-lensed glasses. "Amy has become a bit hysterical about this affair," he said, with a hint of contempt in his voice. "I don't see how any intelligent person could believe a man as dead as Dorcas could actually get up and walk out of here. Though I must admit I can't explain it logically."

"Nor can I," Mr. Neff said sadly. "Nor can I."

He was just leaving when the Coroner waddled down the steps after him. "Come back here a minute," he puffed, "I want to show you something."

Mr. Neff followed the fat man back to his office.

Jameson pointed to a package on his desk. "*That* just came by Western Union messenger."

Mr. Neff stared.

The open package contained two sparkling clean laboratory jars.

The extras hit the streets at seven that evening.

Headlines announced: *DEAD MAN PROWLS CITY STREETS. POLICE HUNT WALKING CORPSE. HAS HITLER RETURNED?* Artists' sketches of G. Dorcas, drawn from his post-mortem photograph, emphasized the small black mustache. Despite the absence of down-swept forelock, the pictures did bear a certain resemblance to the author of Europe's late disturbance. Articles by retired colonels reviewed the known facts and suggested the possibility of Hitler's return.

The Post-Telegraph believed Hitler had been brought back by Russian scientists to head a world uprising. *The Republican Intelligencer* proposed that if the ambulatory corpse was in fact the late Nazi chieftain, his aid should be enlisted in the fight against communism.

Pink, plump Coroner Jameson, besieged by newspapermen, refused to comment. By eleven next morning the local FBI office was receiving an average of 200 calls per hour on black-mustached men carrying mysterious bundles. Most of the packages investigated proved to be groceries, though one contained a live Mallard duck.

Meanwhile, supposedly related events poured in from every major city. Hitler and Stalin were definitely seen in Twin Forks, and immediately afterwards the city experienced its worst thunderstorm in fifty-five years.

A man in Bismarck filed suit for divorce against his wife because she called him "a Dorcas." In Missoula, a mattress in the city jail began carrying local radio programs. And a farmer near Prescott reported that a rosebush had suddenly started to bear blackberries.

All these events were promptly investigated by members of the D.I.D. staff.

The first mention of an interplanetary invasion came from Yogi Kamasutra, the former Jake Perry.

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"Dorcas is one of the first Venusians," he said, in a story that rated two columns on most front pages. "Only the psychically blind can fail to see The Truth. It is what I have been predicting for years. The Venusians have strange powers, known on Earth to yogis and their adepts. They possess forces that are millions of times greater than our puny atomic energies. They will depopulate the earth and set up a new and better world government. Only the yogis, by virtue of their superior knowledge, will be saved!"

Yogi Kamasutra promptly raised his "initiate fee" from $10 to $50, and soon had two secretaries giving receipts to hordes of would-be adepts.

"He's making a good thing of it," Squires told Mr. Neff that evening at his hotel. "Too good. If you ask me, the yogi started this whole deal himself, so that he could cash in on it."

"I should like to believe you," Mr. Neff said, furrowing his bushy black eyebrows. "But how? You've got fingerprints out of Dorcas's hotel room that match those taken from the body in the morgue, before it disappeared. You've got prints taken from the elevator button in the Hotel Clarency. They all match. Explain how the yogi — or any Earth person — could manage that, and I'll feel a lot better than I do right now."

Squires nodded unhappily. "I don't know why they stuck me on this case, anyway. Maybe you should have had a lad off the bunco squad. This don't look like a homicide job."

"It isn't yet," Mr. Neff admitted. "But you do have a corpse. If you can catch it . . ."

"Yeah," said Squires. He crossed his legs, lit a cigarette, and took some papers from his brief-case. "We've checked the staff pretty thoroughly. I think we can rule out all the stenos and office workers. The others look clean, but who knows?"

"You don't go along with the idea of a man from Planet X, then?"

"No! There isn't any man born, and I don't care if he's from Planets X, Y, Z, or even Q, who can walk around without his brains in his head."

"I can't entirely agree, Inspector. What about chickens? There are many authenticated cases of headless roosters living for several days when fed with an eyedropper. And what about that dog's head that was kept alive? And the heart that kept beating in a laboratory? What about your starfish that can be cut to pieces, and each piece grows a new animal? And the sea-cucumber. An interesting beast, Inspector. When frightened, it expels its internal organs and lies dormant on the sea floor for weeks, during which time it grows new organs. So why wouldn't a man from another planet — ?"

"That's okay for starfish and earthworms and such. But a *man?* No. Dorcas didn't climb out of that locker under his own power."

"But he did go to the Hotel Clarency and raise a fuss. And what about those fingerprints?"

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"Well," said Squires doggedly, "this guy Galton figured there's 64 billion patterns possible. That's only four times the number of fingers in the world. Well, it *could* happen —"

"It could, but neither of us believe it, do we, Inspector?"

"Maybe not." He shuffled his papers. "Here's the set-up on the morgue you asked about. There are fifteen people working there — clerks, stewards, toxicologists, and so on. But only five were concerned with Dorcas. That's Browning, the lab man; his assistant, Miss Constantine; old Krag, the attendant; and Dr. Davenport, the receiving physician."

"And the fifth person?"

"The fifth," Squires said, studying his nails, "is Coroner E. P. Jameson, M.D. He superintends the day staff; Dr. Davenport has a skeleton crew on nights. There's a four-hour lapse when there's no physician on at all. That's four A.M. to eight A.M., and another lapse when Jameson goes off, after four P.M."

The telephone rang, and Miss Applegarde answered. "Speaking," she said. "Oh, Mr. Shebley. Yes, I'll tell him." She turned to Mr. Neff. "It's snowing in Liberia. First time on record."

"We'd better check." Neff took the phone. "Hello, John. This may be it. Let's get a crew right out there. Maybe you can contact Kendrick. He's up in Uganda on that report of a herd of midget elephants. Hm? Yes, the Dorcas thing is shaping up faster than I like to see it. So we'll want to cover everything now, no matter how remote. Call back in an hour or so, will you, John?" He hung up.

Squires scratched gently at his long nose, but all he said was, "I'll be at headquarters, just around the corner from the coroner's office."

"Thanks," Mr. Neff said. "I think Miss Applegarde and I will wander over for a chat with Dr. Davenport. He must have been a mighty surprised man when the corpse he certified as dead got up and walked away."

Dr. Davenport was in his one-room-and-kitchenette cooking his breakfast at four in the afternoon. He was an ordinary appearing young man, moderately good-looking, and of average build. His dark face bore an expression of habitual melancholy. "Hope you'll excuse the upside-downness of everything," he said. "That's life on the graveyard shift. Have some coffee?"

"Gladly," Mr. Neff said. "You're in a rather curious occupation for a young medical man. Do you like the work better than private practice?"

"Frankly, no. I tried private practice my first year out. But I was already in debt for my training, and what with office, and equipment and all, I went in a lot deeper. So I made this connection with the City. It's given me a chance to pay everything up, so I'm leaving the end of this month. Getting married and moving to Red Bluff to try G. P. again. There are cigarettes in that box, if you'd like one."

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"Thank you. It was you who received Dorcas at the morgue, wasn't it, Doctor?"

"Yes." He flipped his egg over expertly, slid it into a plate with crisped bacon and toast, and sat down. "Around six in the morning. I just gave him a routine preliminary, and sent him into the locker room. No wounds, or appearance of violence. Characteristic white foam extruding from nose and mouth. Caused by choking, you know. When water's drawn in, it stimulates a large amount of mucus, and the victim gags on that."

"If Dorcas had been drugged or poisoned, and then thrown in the water, I take it those characteristics wouldn't appear?"

"No, though he might have been drugged, and revived when he hit the cold water. The autopsy would show that."

"There was no reason to suspect it was other than a simple case of drowning?"

Dr. Davenport buttered a bit of toast and ate it before answering. "Well, there was one thing. Dorcas's hands were closed, but they weren't clenched. It's more usual for a drowned person's hands to be clenched. But not always. I didn't think it was suspicious at the time."

"Perhaps it isn't important. Tell me, Doctor, what are your own thoughts on Dorcas? I mean, off the record."

Dr. Davenport's lips smiled icily. "Laugh if you want. I'm inclined to think there *is* something to this interplanetary business. I mean, he's alive, unless the hotel clerk and manager are liars. And he fools around with higher mathematics on an unknown type of paper. Well, doesn't it add up?"

Mr. Neff said soberly, "There's an old saying that you can't give the answer unless you know the problem. I've the uncomfortable feeling we still don't know the problem."

The murder of Alice Marbury by G. Dorcas was international news by ten the next morning.

Dorcas's fingerprints were in the plushy apartment where the almost-nude body of Miss Marbury was discovered. She was found by Mrs. Mehaffy, the manager, who screamed, called the police, and fainted as soon as her picture had been taken for the newspapers.

No one had seen Dorcas enter, but it was he himself who provided the tip. At eleven the previous evening he had knocked on the door, tipped his hat politely, and advised Mrs. Mehaffy that there was a disturbance going on in 1401. It sounded like a lovers' quarrel, he said, but you never could tell. Mrs. Mehaffy had gone upstairs, and the man had gone away. Afterwards, she remembered the small black mustache, but at the time she had no idea she'd been talking to the famous walking corpse.

"I don't like it, Mr. Neff," Squires said, as they prowled around Miss Marbury's apartment. "He's too

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nervy. And seems like he never heard of fingerprints, the way he leaves 'em around so careless-like."

"Perhaps," Miss Applegarde said, looking over the dressing table, "they don't use the Bertillon system on Planet X."

"If Dorcas got here from Planet X only two weeks ago," Squires growled, "what would he have against this girl, now?"

"Maybe she's from another planet too," Miss Applegarde suggested. "An interplanetary spy whom he was delegated to liquidate."

Inspector Squires gallantly restrained his opinion of the Department of Interplanetary Defense at that point. He merely said they'd contacted the girl's mother in Topeka, learned when and where she was born. She'd come to the Coast three years ago to seek work as a fashion model, and had evidently succeeded. "Of course," he added, "I haven't seen her certificate yet, but I don't guess it'll show Jupiter or the moon as her place of birth. The boys are working up a full report. I'll send you a copy as soon as it's ready."

There was a call for Mr. Neff when he reached his hotel. It was Kendrick, phoning from Liberia. "Hello. G. W.? Well, we checked that snow. It fell to a depth of six inches in some places. Water content eleven percent. Slight trace of nitrogen, normal after an electrical storm. Some organic matter — insects, pollen, spores. More than normal, but probably explained by the sudden way she blew up. I've been over their weather data for the past twenty years, and the last three have shown some unusual variations."

"Unusual how?"

"There's been a consistent drop in the mean average. This snow seems to be the result of a storm that swept down from the Atlantic, and simply coasted in farther than usual. It's consistent with observations farther north. Want a technical break-down now?"

"No — send it in to Glendale by cable. Just tell me in plain language what it amounts to."

"In plain language it's an extra-bad case of the kind of unusual weather you're always having in California."

Mr. Neff grinned. "There is a hint of malice in your remark. But I get the idea. How are all the elephants in Uganda?"

"Well, there are supposed to be some 20,000. I must have examined 19,000 personally, but no midgets. Might as well come back in."

"Okay. And Kendrick, will you pick up a set of those Arthur Szyk stamps when you come through Monrovia? My nephew is a postage stamp collector."

The report on Alice Marbury came in an hour later. Mr. Neff and Miss Applegarde studied it carefully at dinner. Alice Marbury was born in Wichita, went to grammar and high school in Topeka. Her parents were well-to-do, and she had money of her own from a grandmother's estate.

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She was thirty-one years of age, and worked occasionally as a photographic model. She seemed to make few friends, and was married briefly to a Bender Squires — no relation to the Inspector. The marriage had blown up after four months, apparently without hard feelings.

There was little information available about her visitors. There'd been one fellow who used to come around regularly, but he hadn't been seen for several months. Medium height, dark complexioned, slender, ordinary sort of face. He was about thirty-five, name unknown. No significant correspondence found. There was fifty dollars in cash and loose change in the apartment.

Death had been due to strangulation, and had occurred a few minutes before eleven P.M. There had been no criminal attack, and no evidence of struggle.

"I imagine you can add a bit to that," Mr. Neff said. "You looked her things over pretty carefully."

Miss Applegarde signaled the waiter for another piece of cherry pie. "She saved stuff. I'll bet that girl didn't throw away so much as an old cold cream jar since she moved into the apartment. Closet full of clothes, which you'd expect of a model, but some of the gowns go back four or five years. If it was me, I'd have bundled them off to the Salvation Army. And stockings! She had a drawer loaded. Most of 'em full of runs and snags, and beyond any hope of repairing. Same with all her other things."

"From which you conclude?"

Miss Applegarde shrugged. "A gal who hangs on to stuff is a gal who hangs on to stuff. I have a hunch she was extremely self-centered. Egotistical. Not that she didn't have looks enough to be egotistical about. I figure nobody ever took any candy away from *that* baby. Nor anything else. Not while she was conscious."

"Or alive," Mr. Neff said softly. "I think that is an important point."

"Uh huh. When do the space-ships arrive?"

"Maybe they don't. If Dorcas came from another planet, he didn't seem to use a vehicle of any kind. I think we'd have heard about it. But they might have transformed him from matter into an energy wave, and projected the wave to earth, where he was reassembled again as matter." He stirred his coffee. "I read a story like that in *Popular Science Fiction.*"

Miss Applegarde glanced at him shrewdly. "You're on to it," she said.

"I'm beginning to get an idea," he said. "But I could be very wrong. I've already got a surgical appliance house on the job, though. They think I'm crazy."

Inspector Squires came in and sat down at their table.

"Well, we found him."

"I thought you would," Mr. Neff said.

"Oh, you did, did you?" The Inspector looked exasperated. "Maybe you know *where* we found him?"

"I hate to spoil your fun. So where?"

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"Back in Compartment 37 of the City Morgue! You know how the compartments are built like filing cabinets? Well, there's a kind of platform that slides out on rollers. Old Krag noticed this one was slightly open this morning. He takes a look inside, and nearly faints."

"Mr. Dorcas had resumed his previously deceased condition?"

"Seems as though. We posted guards, and got half the staff on the medical college down there giving him a look-over. They hand us some hocus-pocus about not relying on negative findings because the guy's stuffings is removed, and it's not a normal case. But they say lack of diaphragmatic breathing, pulse, muscle tone of eyeballs, and post-mortem lividity are strong evidence of a nonfunctioning organism. End quote."

Mr. Neff said thoughtfully, "Has Mrs. Mehaffy seen the body?"

"Not yet. But I asked her to come down. You want to come along?"

"It might be instructive. Particularly if Miss Applegarde happens to have a bottle of nail-polish remover in her purse. I'm beginning to think Dorcas had a special reason for courting publicity, and if he did, I think I know what happened."

Mrs. Mehaffy was waiting when they arrived. She wore her best black satin, all her chins, and a wilted gardenia on her shoulder. She plumped importantly past the guards to Compartment 37, glanced gingerly inside, and declared, "That's him. That's the man!"

Mr. Neff bent over with a bottle of nail-polish remover. He applied a few drops to Mr. Dorcas's upper lip, and a moment later lifted off the prominent black mustache. "Take another look, Mrs. Mehaffy. Are you still sure this is the man who rang your bell the night of the murder?"

Mrs. Mehaffy looked longer this time — a couple of seconds. "Oh, yes. Quite, *quite* sure."

"Thank you," Mr. Neff murmured.

Mrs. Mehaffy retreated.

Inspector Squires said, "Now, why the phony brush?"

"I believe it's part of a very elaborate deception, Inspector. Like a professional magician's razzle-dazzle."

Squires' shrewd brown eyes glistened. "You mean, this guy here in 37 isn't from Planet X, he didn't kill nobody, and for all we know, is an optical illusion?"

Mr. Neff smiled broadly. "That's what I suspect — though you'll remember the late Harry Houdini never denied the existence of genuine spiritual phenomena. He merely said — and proved — that he could duplicate any given instance of spiritual phenomena by purely physical means. That's my position, Inspector. I don't say Planet X isn't involved in this problem. But I do say I know how these events could have been duplicated."

"That's good enough for me. Just tell me who else could duplicate it, and I'll go put the cuffs on the guy."

"I don't know who for sure. But if you'll meet me in the morning, I'll

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try to pin him down for you then."

"Why not now?"

"I'll need a gimmick I don't have yet. And Inspector, there's still the possibility our defunct friend here may really be from out of this world. We've got to make sure. The survival of the human race could depend on what we learn tomorrow morning."

Squires stared. "It's been plenty of years since I had the shivers, Mr. Neff. But I think I got 'em now."

A special messenger brought a small package to Mr. Neff before breakfast the next morning. He unwrapped what appeared to be a dirty-yellowish pair of gloves, and put them in his coat pocket. Then he and Miss Applegarde met Inspector Squires.

"Did you get any more on the fellow who used to see Miss Marbury several months ago?" he asked the Inspector.

"Nothing. But you know how those big city apartments are. No one even knows who lives across the hall, let alone who the visitors are. And a guy who's seeing a babe under cover is going to be extra careful anyway."

"Anything to make you think this was under cover?"

"We found out this Marbury's divorce didn't become final until just a few weeks ago."

"Well, it ties in. Let's go see Coroner Jameson. And you better bring your ray-gun with you."

Mr. Neff drew the pair of yellowish gloves from his pocket and laid them on the desk in the Coroner's office. They were shabby looking objects, colored an uneven tobacco-stain yellow. The material was thin, leathery, and wrinkled. There were patches on each finger where the wearer's nails might have come through, and the open ends were ragged and uneven.

"Dr. Jameson," said Mr. Neff amiably, "I wonder if you'd ask Dr. Davenport to step in for a moment?"

Jameson spoke briefly into an annunciator, and the solemn-faced young physician came in. "I was staying over my regular shift to finish up some work," he began, "and —" His voice dried off into silence. His face whitened as his eyes found the unsightly gloves on the Coroner's desk.

"You recognize your property?" Mr. Neff asked quietly.

"Wh-where — how did you find them? I was sure —"

"We have ways, you know. Some of them quite remarkable. There's just one point I don't know. Why did you have to *kill* Miss Marbury?"

Davenport slumped into a chair. His lips worked soundlessly before the words finally came. "She wouldn't call it quits," he said wearily. "It wasn't just that she'd tell Doris — my fiancée — about our affair. There was something else. An illegal operation. I — I performed it on her about a year ago. She threatened to tell the Medical Board if I didn't marry her. They'd take away my license to practice medicine."

"You figured there was no way out

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but to kill her. So you laid a clever plan. You created Dorcas, the interplanetary murderer. You rented a room at the Hotel Clarency. You wore a false mustache — a little black toothbrush affair that once was Hitler's trademark. It was the one feature people would be sure to remember. And you wore faintly tinted glasses that helped alter your expression. It wasn't a *disguise;* it was an *effect.*

"Well then, you used new ten-dollar bills, and some business correspondence to build up Dorcas's identity, and leave some blind alleys for us to follow. The peculiar native paper, the mathematics, the curvature formula that was slightly inaccurate. A nice touch, that. All to create the impression of a man from another planet. You didn't have to spend all night at the Hotel Clarency, either. Your work here isn't too pressing. You probably slipped away around ten at night, said good evening to the clerk, and then went to your room. You'd mess up the bed, leave a newspaper or some soiled laundry lying around, and duck back here without being seen.

"You waited. Cases were coming into the morgue every night, but none of them suited you. Finally the harbor police brought in a man. His build, his age, his general appearance were not unlike yours. He was an unknown. He might have had a mustache or growth of beard; it didn't much matter. You knew the boys who brought him in hadn't paid much attention to his appearance. It was a calculated risk, but the odds were in your favor. You had plenty of opportunity to plant letters, money, and identifying papers on him. You glued on the Hitlerian brush. And you dressed him in one of those two tailored suits you had soaking in a salt solution.

"After that, it was easy. The people at the Hotel Clarency were phoned and they came to the morgue expecting to see Dorcas. In the dim light and gloomy atmosphere they saw the mustache, made an over-allowance for the missing glasses, and identified the corpse, reasonably enough, as their tenant in 401.

"You hung around after your shift was over the next morning. Mr. Krag followed his usual routine with respect to removal of the organs and preparation of specimens. It was no trick for you to substitute your own specimens. What were they? Freshly killed goat?"

"Chimpanzee," Dr. Davenport said. "Got the organs cheap from an experimental lab, and kept them in a frozen-food locker."

"Yes. Then you went home. By noon Miss Constantine and Mr. Browning were in a stew over the samples. You'd hidden the corpse by simply switching it to an unused locker. The lockers are occupied in rotation, and you knew which one wouldn't be used for several days.

"When the uproar was at its peak, you put on your mustache and glasses, went to the Hotel Clarency, and scared the clerk witless by demanding

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your room. Your purpose was to furnish proof that Dorcas had risen from the dead and was walking around.

"Then you called Alice Marbury and made a date to talk it over with her. You let her think you were willing to reconsider, that you might marry her. Anyway, you went up as Davenport, stayed a while, and then strangled her.

"You made up as Dorcas again, went downstairs to Mrs. Mehaffy, and made sure you'd be remembered. Later, you switched the corpse you'd hidden back to its original locker, and presto, Mr. Dorcas had come home."

Inspector Squires said, "What about the fingerprints?"

"Tell the Inspector how you did that, will you, Doctor?"

Dr. Davenport's smile was tired as he glanced at the gloves on the table. "*That's* how. Though how he found 'em —"

"I didn't. I had these made up of a flexible plastic. They're phonies. I'd seen a real pair like these in Germany. They were made of human skin from the hands of some poor devil in a concentration camp. A Gestapo official was using them in a neat double-cross scheme. I suppose, Dr. Davenport, you made these up from a medical school cadaver. Tannic acid could be used as a preservative, the same as you'd use to tan any piece of animal hide. All you needed to do was pull them on, and leave the prints of your alter ego wherever and whenever you chose. And though the corpse was given a regular fingerprinting when it was brought in, you simply took a blank form, used the gloveprints on it, and retyped the data before destroying the original form. That was how you proved the identity of Dorcas all along the line, to corroborate the testimony of the witnesses.

"It was a fantastic plan. So fantastic it might well have succeeded. G. Dorcas could have become another unsolved mystery. And Dr. Alex Davenport might have practiced quietly with his new wife in a small California town for the rest of his natural days."

"What made you suspect him?" Miss Applegarde asked.

"It was simply a matter of observation," Mr. Neff said. "I tried to visualize each person here with a black brush mustache. Dr. Jameson is too fair complexioned and too — ah — heavy-set. He wouldn't do. Neither would Norris Krag, who is too old. And Browning is too tall, too red-headed, besides having extremely light blue eyes. Davenport, though — he *did* fit."

The telephone rang and Coroner Jameson answered it. "It's a call from Bombay," he said. "Person-to-person for George Washington Neff."

Mr. Neff listened, and nodded his head sadly. "Okay, Professor Bikram," he said into the transmitter. "A Bhuddist monk getting messages from the moon through one of the monastery's diamonds. Got it. Thanks for calling." He rose. "One of those things, I suppose. But we'd better check it anyway. After all, you never can tell. . . ."

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WINNERS OF A THIRD PRIZE: JEROME & HAROLD PRINCE

As you know, Jerome and Harold Prince, brothers, are an EQMM discovery. We published their first story — about Inspector Magruder, metropolitan manhunter — and the few Magruder tales which followed. The first pair of Magruder investigations were definitely literary in style and approach, and so dark and brooding in mood that we once referred to the authors as the Princes of Darkness. The two stories, "The Man in the Velvet Hat" and "The Finger Man," were a remarkable blend of detection and horror, written in a staccato style which was blood-brother to the stream-of-consciousness technique. As a result, the two stories were not everybody's dish: we were afraid that those who like their homicides à la ham-and-eggs would not find the criminous caviar prepared by the Princes entirely to their taste.

So, it was at your Editors' suggestion that the authors broke away from experimental phrasing and word-color probing, from typographic tricks and moving-picture moods. The third Magruder tale was more orthodox in treatment and written as a straight detective story of mystery, suspense, and mounting terror. This third story, "The Watchers and the Watched," proved to be their most successful, and yet it contained enough of the Princely quality to be an integrated part of the slowly-growing saga of Inspector Magruder.

Then, for nearly four years — silence. No word from the Princes, and no further adventures of Magruder. What had happened? We still do not know. But we did learn that in the summer of 1949 the Prince brothers became involved in television; and out of this new experience in a new medium has come the latest Magruder story — in a television technique which again retains enough of the Princely quality to stamp the story with individuality and which again combines experimentation and tried-and-true 'tec craftsmanship.

"CAN YOU SOLVE THIS CRIME?"

by JEROME & HAROLD PRINCE

THE emcee looked up into the video camera and said: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Here we are once again ready to play that exciting quiz game — the game in which *you* play detective — 'Can You Solve This Crime?' Here's how we play it. Each week the 'Can You

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Solve This Crime Players' re-enact the events of a famous *unsolved* crime from real life — *right* — *here* — *in* — *the* — *studio!* Then three contestants chosen from our viewing audience . . ."

The emcee nodded to where we sat behind a long table.

" . . . Mrs. Stephanie Kusak . . ."

She was at the other end of the table. Twenty-eight, sun-tanned, Max Factored, cerise lipsticked, toenails to match. There were tracks under her eyes like the convolutions on a weather map.

" . . . Mr. Fred Wilson . . ."

He sat next to me. Thirty-two. Blue suit, very pressed — thin cheeks, very shaved — white collar, very starched — pencil streaks of hair over a mottled pink scalp. He was the kind of man who goes white with emotion because he hasn't enough blood to go around. Clerk.

" . . . Mr. George Kirby . . ."

Me. Sixty-four. My flesh is a billboard advertising the joys of living. A paunch and varicose veins and sagging jowls — and a smile that never leaves me.

" . . . and these three contestants," the emcee said, "are challenged to match wits with a member of the New York Police Force. The police officer and our three amateur sleuths will see tonight's unsolved crime re-enacted on a television screen here in the studio, just as you're seeing it at home — or in your favorite tavern. Then *after* the re-enactment, all the contestants are asked to give their solutions to our mystery. If the applause of our studio audience — as shown on this applause meter — indicates that one of our three would-be Hawkshaws has come up with a better solution than our police officer — and it *has* been done . . ."

We laughed.

" . . . then we give him this key to our Mystery Room — which tonight, as usual, is packed like Fibber McGee's closet with valuable prizes . . ."

We looked at the door painted *Mystery Room* hopefully.

"*But* . . . !" the emcee's voice waved a finger at us. "Should the police officer win — and he *might* — then the cash equivalent of the prizes goes, of course, to the Police Athletic League or to any other charity he cares to designate. But hold on to your hats! *Because* — when the police officer wins, the prizes *don't budge* from our Mystery Room — and *new* prizes keep piling up week after week until the police officer loses! *So* — sharpen your wits, you lucky contestants, because the jackpot is really bulging tonight! Not *one* of our amateur sleuths has been able to outsmart the police for the *last* — *twenty-six* — *weeks!*"

The emcee turned to us.

"And it's not going to be easy," he said, "for any of you three to do it tonight. *Because* — tonight we have with us — our very special guest — the world-famous metropolitan manhunter — Inspector — John — B. — *Magruder!*"

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The last line came over with the punch of a stamping machine — and there *he* was, embraced by the applause, waving his hand and grinning, the man who stood between us and the $52,000 jackpot — John B. Magruder. He was: a powerful neck that thrust the points of his collar out like the tail of an airplane — an old brown suit that never had been pressed — lips laid on each other like bricks — eyes watchful and wary — close-cropped black hair like spikes on a high wall. He was: the moment you come home late at night and see the yellow envelope of a telegram sticking out from under your door. He was a cop.

"And how does it feel to be here tonight, Inspector?" the emcee asked.

"Fine. Just fine."

And the catechism of commonplace was on. First Magruder, lounging easily in a big chair on the left of the stage. Then me. Then Wilson. And finally, Stephanie Kusak said:

"Oh, no! The only pet I have at home is my husband."

The audience roared, and the emcee said, chuckling:

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Kusak. . . . Now I think we all know each other rather well and we're ready to play, 'Can You Solve This Crime?'" Soberly, dynamically, "*So* . . . for the documentary re-enactment of tonight's famous unsolved crime with our all-star cast . . . take it away, John McCarey!"

The lights in the studio went down slowly, and in front of us, on the TV screen, a pencil of electrons began to sketch a picture, growing stronger, fading in . . .

Night. A city street.

"One hundred sixty-ninth Street in upper Manhattan," the narrator's voice said off the screen. "July 10th, 1940."

The street was blank and dim. The buildings were locked up tight. Light spilled from a lamp-post at the end of the street, poured greasy-glimmering down the center of the asphalt. Now a speeding car raised a brief tide of noise — like bacon frying in a skillet — and tatters of newspapers became flippant in its wake. But there was no other motion. No other sound.

"Temperature: 86," said the narrator. "Humidity: 84. No relief in sight. Time . . . ?"

Suddenly, a baby cried. The camera flashed to the outside of a tenement. A light snapped on in an upper story. The baby's cry swelled into a panting scream, faded into a contented gurgle as the nipple found its mouth.

"Time . . . ?" asked the narrator. "Two A.M."

The camera swung away from the building, glided down the street, peeped into a doorway. A boy was holding a girl, pressing his lips against the swelling of her collarbone, drinking in the odor of her long black hair. Her head, above his shoulders, was tilted back, swaying softly, listening to some vague song out there in the street.

"Two A.M.," said the narrator

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gently. "Time to say good night, Kitty."

Kitty sighed, and the girl, the boy, the doorway faded slowly — and now we were looking down the street again. A drunk had just turned the corner, was staggering toward us.

"Two A.M.," the narrator chided. "Time to get home from your business meeting, Mr. Doyle."

Mr. Doyle began to hurry. He moved down the street stiff-legged, awkwardly, like Bolger dancing the Tin Man from The Wizard of Oz. The camera swung along at his side, catching him against the background of blacked-out storefronts, doorways, windows — then stopped abruptly. Mr. Doyle lurched out of the frame.

On the screen now was the outside of a neighborhood tavern: Two windows plastered with displays. A door between them painted black. A dead neon sign that said, *Pereira's Place.* And light, from a dim source in the rear, splattering feebly on the sidewalk.

"Two A.M.," said the narrator. "Time to close up, Pereira."

The light went out. The camera began to move in slowly toward the door.

"Come on out, Pereira," said the narrator. "Let's see what doll you have on your arm tonight."

The camera crept closer. The door was shut tight. It stayed shut tight. The music began; grim, foreboding notes from the belly of the orchestra.

"What's holding you, Pereira?"

The camera kept moving in: the door growing larger and larger — drums pounding — strings trembling — dissonances, louder and louder . . .

"Come on out, Pereira!"

The door swelling faster and faster, the music building: a crescendo of splintered sounds . . .

"*Come on out, Pereira!*"

The door filling the screen, the music ripping to a climax . . .

Then —

A man screamed: a high-pitched sound full of fear and pain that lodged in your head and spun around between your ears. It stopped razor-sharp. It was followed by the dark thump of a falling body. Then everything stopped, sound and motion, like a clock that had fallen to the floor.

For as long as you could count three, the screen remained that way. Then the door burst open — banging, clanging, screeching. It swept against the camera eye, covered it like a blindfold. Someone was fleeing. We couldn't see who it was, but we could hear the footsteps — leather-heeled, frantic — racing down the street, fading fast.

Then the picture in front of us changed. We were looking at a garbage can standing near a curb. The footsteps were running toward it, growing stronger, very near now. They stopped. An unseen hand yanked the cover from the can, threw it to the pavement. We could hear the clatter of tin on cement, the metal-sounds bouncing back from the buildings. The unseen hand

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hurled something into the can. The footsteps exploded like a sprinter's, subsided rapidly into a muffled clicking in the distance.

Now the camera began to move in on the garbage can. Excitement rose from the music like heat waves from a pavement on a summer's day. The camera closed-up on the garbage can, peered over the top.

There it was. It lay across a half-eaten slice of rye bread. It was stained. It glinted. The flies were eating the stains. It was a Bowie knife.

"Pereira *didn't* come out," said the narrator.

The music smashed.

"That was it," said the narrator off the screen. "That was the beginning of the Pereira case — a case that was to rock New York for months, wipe out the political future of one District Attorney, and shake up the police department with a violence that hasn't been matched since . . ."

As he spoke, the camera took us into the interior of *Pereira's Place.* Pereira's body, covered with a sheet, lay in front of the bar. A policeman, his face stiff with authority, stood rigidly over it. Around him, the room bubbled with excitement. Detectives were everywhere, spraying for fingerprints, probing, searching, examining. Boys rushed in, dirty-faced, excited, distributing coffee in cardboard containers, glancing, shining-eyed, covertly, at the corpse on the floor. Reporters swirled around Lieutenant Connally, hurling questions, looking at each other wisely, cynically, as the answers shot back ready-made and neatly packaged. Flashbulbs popped. There was a noise behind it all like a fight crowd heard from a distance.

" . . . But who was the man whose death caused all this?" asked the narrator, as the camera began to close in on Pereira's body. "Who was Vincent Pereira? Why would anybody want to kill him? Let's go back to the night before his death and see . . ."

The camera had moved in until now Pereira's sheet-covered face filled the screen, but that dissolved swiftly — and in its place, there was Pereira's face, alive, triumphant, talking into a phone.

"Did I clean up?" he was boasting. "Did I clean up!" He had a voice that was heavy, rich, and dry, like a cordial. "I win myself six hundred iron men!"

He grinned. His brilliantly-even teeth shone happily in his olive-dark face. He was about thirty-five, sitting on top of the world — his world, anyway — and he wanted everybody to know it. He was lean, handsome, with a touch of Valentino about his features, and smooth black hair that glistened like a water-wet pavement.

"Pereira . . ." The sound came from close beside him, off the screen. It was a man's voice, low, pleading.

Pereira ignored it. The camera swept back, revealing a slice of *Pereira's Place.* Pereira was seated on a high cashier's stool, a cash register on the desk in front of him. On his right,

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several men were drinking at the bar. Their backs were toward us. On his left, close to him, a small thin man with a fist-broken face was desperately trying to get his attention. The man's body jittered nervously, and his eyes swept from Pereira to the door in an ecstasy of fear. He was living on the edge of something about to happen, and that something might walk in the door any minute. That was Dugan.

"Pereira . . ." he said again.

"Shut up," Pereira said, then into the phone, smiling. "What good did it do me? Right away, I drop it all in a game of stud."

"Pereira . . ."

Pereira wheeled away abruptly, turning his back on Dugan. "Then I drop three hundred of my own," he told the phone, still smiling. "How do you like that! I pick up six hundred berries like it was dirt, then I have to bum six bits for breakfast."

Dugan leaned forward as tight as if he had been tied with rope from head to foot, hesitated for a moment, then shot out his hand suddenly and tugged at Pereira's jacket. "I've gotta talk to you," he shouted.

Pereira didn't move a muscle. Dugan dropped his hand stiffly to his side, took a step back, and waited. You could hear the buzzing of the earpiece and the air sawing through Dugan's nostrils.

Pereira chuckled. "Yeah," he said to the phone. "Some days it don't pay to get up." He wiggled his shoulder, smoothing the bulge Dugan's fingers had made in his coat. "Say, listen," he went on. "There's a jerk here. Gotta talk to me. Very important. Big deal. . . . I don't know. Something. . . . Yeah. See ya."

He slid the receiver back into its cradle deliberately, then pivoted about slowly toward Dugan, a hint of sour, dry amusement at the corners of his lips.

Dugan was sweating and making vague placatory gestures with his hands. "I'm sorry, Pereira, honest," he blurted. "But I need help bad. You gotta help me."

"*Gotta* help you? What's the matter, Dugan?" Pereira asked, comically exaggerating the tone of a mother comforting a child. "You sick?"

"I'm not sick, Pereira. The cops are on my tail."

"Yeah?" Pereira said wonderingly. "Now what would the cops want with a nice boy like you?"

"I couldn't help it, Pereira. So help me, I couldn't!" Dugan said, the words coming swiftly, tumbling over each other in the liquid accents of Brooklyn. "It wasn't my fault!"

"What wasn't your fault?"

"I cut up a guy."

"Stick-up?"

"No, no. A fight."

"Not none of my old mob from Chi?" Pereira asked slowly, his eyes narrowing.

"No, Pereira, no," Dugan said quickly. "Nobody you know."

"Kill him?"

"I don't know."

Pereira grinned broadly. "What's the matter, Dugan?" he asked, play-

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ing with the words like darts. "Didn't you stick around to see?"

"Please, Pereira," Dugan begged. "There ain't much time. You gotta fix it. I know you can do it."

Pereira breathed out sharply through his nose. "What put that thought in your head?"

"It's no secret," Dugan said defensively. "It gets around." His voice sunk to a low whine. "Do it, will ya, Pereira?"

Pereira chose a toothpick from a cardboard box near the cash register and sucked on it reflectively. Dugan watched him heavily for a long moment. Finally, Pereira said, "It takes dough."

Dugan looked as if he were going to let out a whoop. "Sure, sure." He nodded eagerly. "I wasn't born yesterday. How much?"

"A grand."

"You got it. The ring."

"The *ring!*" Pereira said derisively. "That ring ain't worth no grand."

Dugan's head jerked back as if he had been hit. "What do you mean, it ain't worth no grand?" It was pure reflex: belligerent, sharp, and bitter. Pereira scowled. Dugan realized almost immediately that he had made a mistake and tried to smile it away, but all the muscles around his mouth would do was twitch. "How much . . . *did* you get?" he asked hesitantly.

"It's a hot rock!" Pereira said, irritated. "I did swell to get four centuries for it. That ain't no grand."

"No, it ain't," Dugan said tonelessly. "You won't help me then?"

"You got a grand?"

"No."

"Then why should I help you? I'm a business man."

"Sure, Pereira," Dugan said. He looked dazed. "Forget I asked. Just gimme my share. I'll blow. I'll get out of town."

"What share?"

"Half of the ring," Dugan said mechanically. "My two C's."

"What two C's?"

The dazed look on Dugan's face changed to amazement and incredulity. "You're kidding," he said.

"I ain't got no two C's of yours," Pereira said innocently.

"It's mine!" Dugan shouted. He was almost out of his head. "It's my money! You've gotta give it to me!"

The camera cut to the door of the tavern. It opened. Kit came in. You could hear Dugan's voice, off the screen, hysterical, pitched high like a woman's. Kit heard it, too, and stopped, puzzled.

"Have a heart, Pereira!" Dugan was screaming. "Don't you get it? It's a murder rap. I don't want to burn."

The camera cut back to Pereira. He looked up, saw Kit, and his face broke into a big smile. "H'ya, Kit, ol' boy, ol' pal," he called boisterously. "Come on over here, you so-and-so, and say hello to your old pal, Vince."

Off the screen, Kit said miserably, "Hello, Mr. Pereira." He talked as if his mouth were stuffed with cotton.

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The camera cut to a medium shot, and now Pereira, Dugan, the men at the bar, and Kit were all in the picture. Kit moved forlornly over to Pereira. He was over six feet tall with the torso and shoulders of a halfback. He was wearing dungarees and a sport shirt that obviously had been bought for someone else. His head went off stiffly to one side and rolled slightly on his neck. He was eighteen, but it was a good guess that his mental age was less than half of that.

Pereira shouted excitedly, "Did you bring it, Kit? Come on, let's see it."

Dugan said, low, dangerously, "Pereira . . ."

Pereira stiffened. The jovial look went from his face, and contempt and anger grew on it like a plaster mask. He turned to Dugan and said, suddenly, savagely, "Listen, Dugan, do me a favor and stay out of here. Get out."

Dugan shook his head just barely, trying not to believe what he heard. He stared at Pereira, and then quickly looked at the men at the bar. They were twisted around, facing him, their faces cold and deadpan, their eyes derisive. He backed away painfully and nearly stumbled. Then he turned and ran out of the door. The men at the bar went back to their drinking.

"Well, Kit, ol' kid, ol' kid," Pereira said to Kit who was now standing bleakly beside him, "come on, let's see that pail." Pereira was in high spirits again.

Kit lifted the pail he was carrying as if it were filled with lead, and placed it on the desk in front of Pereira. "I tried, Mr. Pereira," he said, utterly wretched. "I tried and tried."

"And you couldn't get it?" Pereira asked with an air of exaggerated surprise.

"No, Mr. Pereira. I — I —"

Pereira swung around to the men at the bar. "Hey, guys!" he called. Their heads turned like electric fans. "Whaddya know? Kit couldn't get a pail of steam!" They roared. They thought it was the funniest thing they had ever heard. Tears began to fill the cups of Kit's eyes.

"Ah, Kit," Pereira said, straight-faced, "I love you anyway. I ain't sore."

"You ain't?" Kit said, brightening.

"Nah," Pereira said. "And to prove it — how'd you like to go to the movies?"

"Movies?"

"Free!" Pereira said.

Kit's body began to tremble with excitement. "Oh, yeah, Mr. Pereira."

"Awright," Pereira said. "Just because you're my pal I'm gonna write you a pass."

"A pass," Kit repeated eagerly.

"Sure," Pereira said. He picked up a pencil and began to scribble on a small pad, reading aloud slowly as he wrote. "Please — admit — Kit — Carson. Kit Carson, that's your name, ain't it, kid?"

Kit nodded vigorously. He made tentative passes at the pad with his hands, his whole body surging toward it, yearning to possess that scrap of

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paper. "I like movies with cowboys."

"That's just what they got."

"Oh, boy!"

"Awright," Pereira said, drawing out the word and ending it sharply to indicate the deal was settled. "I'm gonna fix you up right. Now, I'll just sign it." He began to write again. "Signed — Moon — Mullins." He tore the sheet off the pad and held it up to Kit. "There you are, kid," he said. "Have a good time."

Kit snatched the pass. He was breathing heavily, happily, like a dog whose head had been scratched. "Oh, thanks, Mr. Pereira," he said rapidly.

"Don't mention it," Pereira said. "Just take it to the manager at the Coliseum."

The camera cut to a medium close-up of Kit's face. His attention had become abrupt and whole. His lips moved silently. Then, like a child who had learned a difficult lesson, he exploded triumphantly, "The Coliseum!" Kit cried, his face all bubbling and joyful now. "I'm going to the show!" He hurried to the door.

As he went, the laughter from the bar began and built into a roar. The camera followed him, swinging down slowly from his face, to his neck, to his chest, to his waist — and stopped there. Around his belly was a leather belt. Riding on it, bouncing against his hip, was a sheath. In the sheath was a Bowie knife.

The music hit like a hammer.

"Yes," the narrator said, off the screen, "they found the knife." (*On the screen, a policeman's hands were carefully removing the knife from a garbage can and wrapping it in a clean white handkerchief.*) "They sent it to the lab." (*A glinting scalpel was chipping dried blood off the knife. The screen exploded into a confusion of laboratory tables and glassware, microscopes and technicians. A precipitate began to form lazily in a test tube.*) "They left no room for error. It was Pereira's blood." (*A chord hit, underlining the words, then died away.*)

"One blow from that knife," continued the narrator, "or two at the most, would have been enough to kill Pereira." (*An intense young man in a stiff white laboratory coat was holding up a bloodstained shirt for Lieutenant Connally's inspection.*) "But someone had struck fifteen times." (*The young man was inserting the knife into the gashes rapidly and expertly with all the pent-up excitement of a clever child fitting pegs into holes.*) "Someone who was crazy with hate. Or someone who was just plain crazy. The police could put two and two together. *Let's get Kit!* And the place to get him — *is Pop's . . .*"

The knife faded away and a portion of a candy store faded up on the screen. A little girl was pressing her face against the showcase, her eyes darting from lafayettes to jujubes to licorice sticks to gum drops, her hands saying: some of these and some of these and some of those. The man behind the counter was smiling at her indulgently. He was a chubby midwesterner — about fifty, lunar-faced,

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in radiant health, cheeks puffed like a child's — the kind of a man salesmen take to instinctively.

"Meet Pop," said the narrator. "Pop hadn't been in the neighborhood long. He'd come from the Windy City after his wife killed herself. That was about four years ago, maybe five. But, by now, Pop knew everybody. Everybody knew Pop. And everybody loved him . . ."

Pop said, although we couldn't hear the words, *and how much money have you got for all this, little girl?* The little girl's face went shy and doubtful. She opened a tightly clasped fist, extracted a penny from it, and held it up to Pop, pleading hard with her eyes. Pop chuckled. He reached over the counter, took the penny, then began to fill a paper bag with lafayettes and jujubes and licorice sticks and gum drops and . . .

"Down on your luck, brother?" the narrator asked. "Need a stake? See Pop. In trouble, bud? Think the world's got you licked, sister? Pop'll straighten you out. And if you forget to thank him or pay him back, that's all right with Pop, too. That's the kick he gets out of life — sacrificing himself for others."

Pop leaned over the counter and handed the bulging bag to the little girl. She held it in her hands, staring at it, belief growing slowly like a picture on an inflating balloon. Then her face broadened with delight, as if her remotest hope had been realized. She rushed out, clutching her prize close to her, stopping just once to flash her head backwards and sing out a happy thankyoupop. Pop beamed. He drew a pipe from his pocket and began to suck on it, tapping the empty bowl absent-mindedly with the little finger of his right hand.

"Hey, Pop!" It was a man's voice, off the screen, gravel-shod, peremptory. "How about some service?"

Pop shook off his reverie reluctantly and turned his head in the direction of the voice. Just for a moment, his face clouded, and then he was smiling, brightly, mechanically, like a salesman entering a room. The camera followed him as he took a half-dozen steps over to the soda fountain.

"Well, hello, Lieutenant Connally," he said affably as he walked. His voice was low and lazy-paced with the genial huskiness of a fat man. "How are you today?"

"Hot, Pop." He was sitting on a fountain stool, his collar open, his tie tugged away from his throat, the sweat pouring out of his skin. "How about a coke? Big and *cold*."

"Sure thing, Lieutenant." Pop drew the coke and set it on the counter. "Down on business?" he asked.

Connally downed the coke. "Yeah," he said.

"Pereira?"

"I'm stuck with it, Pop."

"Terrible," Pop said, his face suddenly heavy with sympathy and gloom. "I don't understand why they do it. There are so many evil men in this world."

"There's one less now," Connally said.

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"Don't say that — not even as a joke," Pop said. "All human life is precious."

"Sure, Pop, sure," Connally said, humoring him. He mopped his face with the back of his hand. He looked like a sweating block of granite sitting there — a squat, powerful, rough-faced man in his forties who seemed to have been a cop since the day he was born. "How about another coke?"

While he was drawing it, Pop said conversationally, "There wasn't much about it in the papers this morning."

"Why should there be?" Connally asked. "Somebody kills somebody else in this country every twenty minutes."

"But usually there are details," Pop said, handing over the coke. "How it was done. There was nothing."

"Look, Pop," Connally said laughingly, "when I handle a case, the newspapers get the murder, but they don't get what's behind it." A burst of gas skewered his lips. "Kit inside?" he asked casually.

"No," Pop said, a shade too fast.

"Seen him today?"

"No."

"He slept in back last night?"

"Yes."

"All night?"

Pop said quietly, "You think Kit did it?"

Connally said, "Where is he, Pop?"

Pop seemed to go wild. "It's — it's crazy!" he shouted. "Kit wouldn't harm a fly. He's just a kid — an overgrown kid."

"Sure, Pop, he's just a kid. Except," Connally said with an expression like dry ice, "he has a knife — and he knows how to use it."

"But it can't be true!"

"Evidence, Pop," Connally said patiently. "Come on, where is he?"

"You're a machine, Connally," Pop said, trembling and bitter. "Can't you love people? Or forgive them?"

"Pop, don't be silly," Connally said mildly. "You can't kill a man and say, 'Excuse it please.' "

"But he's a child —"

"Okay. That's in his favor when he comes to trial. But there's no way in the world he can escape arrest. Now, where is he?"

Pop tightened his lips defiantly.

Connally breathed out tiredly through his mouth. "Look, Pop," he said severely, but without raising his voice. "We don't need you. We can find him. But if we go hunting, there may be trouble — and I don't want anybody hurt."

"Hurt?" Pop said dazedly.

"Especially Kit," Connally hammered home.

Pop looked like a boxer whose elaborate defense had been smashed by an accidental blow. He looked around dully and ambiguously. "I don't know . . ." he said after a while.

"Okay, Pop," Connally said crisply. "I'm going to level with you. We've got the knife that killed Pereira. We *think* it's Kit's knife, but —"

"But you're not sure!" Pop said, clutching at a straw. "It may not be Kit's knife."

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"That's right."

"Let me get this straight," Pop said excitedly. "If Kit's wearing his knife, he's in the clear. Right?"

"If Kit's wearing his knife, he's in the clear."

Pop turned sharply and called out, "Kit! Kit!"

The camera cut to a door in the rear of the store.

"Come on out, Kit," Pop's voice urged, off the screen. "Don't be afraid."

As the door swung open, the camera surged in to catch Kit's face in close-up. The sweat covered it like a film of oil, and from the way his throat worked, you knew it was burning with fear. The camera angled down slowly to where the sheath of his Bowie knife hung limply against his hip.

The sheath was empty.

The music came in low and mournful and continued behind the narrator as he said, "Kit confessed."

(*On the screen, impatient detectives in sweat-soaked shirts were hurling questions at Kit, and Kit was tossing the answers back eagerly — nodding, grinning.*)

"Kit confessed to the murder of Vincent Pereira on the night of July 10th, 1940. . . ." (*nodding, grinning*) "But he also confessed . . ." (*nodding, grinning*) ". . . to arson . . ." (*nodding, grinning*) ". . . to burglary . . ." (*nodding, grinning*) ". . . to using the mails to defraud. He wanted to please everybody. But Connally was far from pleased. Besides . . ."

A hard, attractive blonde's face filled the screen.

"There was Lola."

She looked right at us and said in a brassy, whisky-rich voice, "Sure, Kit and me are that way about each other. Him and me were together the night Pereira was killed."

Her face broke into an invitation, then faded tantalizingly into a newspaper ad which was made up of a full-length photo of Lola in wisps of a costume and words that said: *EXOTIC . . . SEXSATIONAL . . . THE ONE AND ONLY LOLA! . . . AT THE CLUB SAVANNAH.*

"Maybe Lola's statement was a press agent's pipe dream," the narrator said behind the action. "Maybe Lola was telling the truth. The police didn't know. But this they did know: The case they had against Kit Carson would never convince a jury of *his* peers."

The ad for the Club Savannah began to fade.

"But who else would want to kill Pereira? Dugan?"

We saw a corpse lying by the side of a country road and state policemen hovering over it.

"But Dugan had a rendezvous with a ditch outside of Yonkers. And the police had a hunch. They figured Dugan couldn't have got out of that ditch, hitch-hiked back to New York, knocked off Pereira, and got back to that ditch — carrying six slugs in his belly. Then — who?"

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A police line-up was in front of us now.

"Who did it?"

And as the camera panned from one face to another in the line-up, we heard Lieutenant Connally's voice, in the stiff, self-conscious tones of a person being interviewed, saying, "No, Mr. McCarey, none of these hoods did it."

And the narrator, in the syrupy, eager-to-be-liked tones of an interviewer, asking, "Why do you say that, Lieutenant Connally?"

"A mobster wouldn't use a knife, Mr. McCarey." A face came on the screen, bright and smooth as an Irish tenor's. "If *he* wanted to take Pereira for a ride, he'd blast him with a tommy-gun."

"Would you state definitely then, Lieutenant, that a professional killer did *not* murder Pereira?"

"I would, Mr. McCarey. No pro would have hid the knife in that garbage can. Pereira was killed by an amateur."

"Or, Lieutenant, by a professional who wanted to make it look like the work of an amateur?"

Quickly, "Hoods aren't smart, Mr. McCarey." Then after a pause, reflectively, "Well . . . I suppose it's a possibility."

The line-up began to fade.

"The truth was," McCarey said, narrating again off the screen, "the police were stumped. They didn't know where to turn, or what to do. Then —"

A chord hit, tense and expectant.

Connally was on the screen. He was trying to hold back the excitement, but it was breaking through, into his eyes, into the perspiration pouring down his face. "Commissioner?" he was saying into a phone. "Commissioner, I've broken the Pereira case!"

The music shouted and cheered.

There was a girl's face on the screen now. Her long blonde hair was wild, her face chalk-white, stiff with shock, and long past the tears you were sure had been shed.

"Yes," said the narrator, behind the action, "this time Connally had cast his net and had come up with a mermaid. The alleged murderess was Georgia Welsh."

The camera drifted back, and now we saw her on a chair in Connally's office, and Connally questioning her, and Georgia just staring out in front of her, not saying a word.

"Even behind those streaks of mascara and that mask of fear," the narrator continued, "a blind man could see that her strong points were not precisely intellectual. She was nineteen, in love with life, and — oh, yes — married . . ."

The police office dissolved, and in front of us now was the kitchen of a tenement flat — the kind of flat that gets the exterminator twice a year, that smells of cabbage and kids and unwashed towels, that always has a leaky faucet and cracks in the ceiling. A young man, in a freshly laundered shirt and neatly pressed pants, was searching the ice box for food.

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"Meet the husband—" said the narrator, "Henry Welsh." Desk-chested, conscious of his little important mustache, the kind of man you see leading Boy Scout troops. "This is the night of July 5th, 1940," the narrator went on, "four days, six hours, and twenty-two minutes before Vincent Pereira met his death by stabbing from person or persons unknown . . ."

Henry had given up the idea of finding anything in the ice box and had turned to the cupboard. He discovered a box of breakfast cereal, but he shook it and it was empty. He shoved it back on the shelf, irritation mounting on his face, glanced nervously at his watch, then opened another cupboard and began rummaging again. His back was to the kitchen door when Georgia came in with a cute twitch of her skirt.

You didn't recognize her at first glance as the girl you had seen in Connally's office a minute ago, but it was Georgia Welsh all right—short-nosed, pulpy-mouthed, faunish-eyed, her full bosom peeping above her blouse, her hips stretching her skirt tight as a girdle. She walked toward Henry, slouch-backed, carelessly, swaying slightly in a sensual way. She was the beautiful-but-dumb blonde of the comic strips—wised-up. She said indifferently, "Hi, lover boy."

Henry wheeled around at the sound of her voice and said angrily, "Where've you been? There's not a thing to eat in the house."

"Well, look at him," Georgia said, her voice tilting upward in contempt. "The big provider. Mr. Vanderbilt." Her eyes flashed. "Give me money and I'll buy food!"

The anger dropped away from him, and suddenly he was utterly contrite. "I'm sorry, Georgia," he said. He stepped toward her and took her in his arms.

"Sorry!" she said. "You're always sorry. Think first, then you won't be sorry."

He brushed his lips against her cheeks. "Georgia—" The word was a caress. "Georgia, I haven't held you in so long . . ."

"Who tells you to go to school every night?"

He dipped his head toward her lips. She twisted her face away sharply. "You need that school like a hole in the head," she said loudly. "Get a job that pays!"

He forced her head back and his mouth closed viciously on her lips. He clung to them passionately, then he drew his head away, his breath coming now quick and dry and shallow. It might have been a mosquito bite for all the effect it had on Georgia. "Finished?" she asked.

"Don't be like that."

He bent his head down again to kiss her, but she pressed her palms against his chest, pushed him away, and broke out of his embrace. "Cut the Tyrone Power stuff," she said, smoothing her clothes. "It's too hot."

He was breathing heavily. "I love you, Georgia," he said. "I'll do any-

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thing for you. You can have anything you want . . ."

"On twenty-two fifty a week?"

"Just be patient," Henry pleaded. "I won't always be a clerk. As soon as I get my degree . . ."

"You and your high-and-mighty degree," she flared up. "What am I supposed to do in the meantime? Sit around and look at the four walls? Saturday night — everybody out having a good time. What am I doing?"

"We can go to the movies."

"Movies! That's *your* idea of a good time. You're a small-time sap, Henry."

"Georgia —"

"You're no good," Georgia shouted. "You'll never make a living. I'll be a drudge the rest of my life if I stay with you. Do you want that?"

"You're crazy, Georgia," Henry said softly, full of anguish. "You don't know what you're saying."

"No? I know what I'm saying all right. There's plenty of guys who'll take care of me — the way I want to be taken care of. *Plenty!*"

Henry said dazedly, "Who?"

"What difference does it make to you?" She spun away from him and flounced toward the door. "I'm going out," she announced. "Don't wait up."

For a moment Henry stood where he was, trying hard to understand what had happened, then he lunged after her, grasped her by the shoulders and swung her around. "Who is it?" he yelled.

She looked up at him coldly and defiantly. "If you're not too busy studying," she said, and her voice was like a hand running over velvet, "come down to *Pereira's Place*. You can watch me dancing with Pereira." She broke away from him.

The camera began to close up on Henry's face, as lifeless now as something on a slab. Then Georgia's voice came from off the screen, calling out, "So long, lover boy," cold as sleet, and the blankness drained out of his face . . .

Then the screen began to disintegrate, as if we were seeing the world through an empty beer bottle . . . and when it became clear again, there was Georgia, back in Connally's office, her face desperate and ravaged, sobbing, "Why don't you leave me alone?"

"Did you ever see this?" Connally thrust a letter at her.

"I don't know."

"I'll refresh your memory," Connally said dryly. He put on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. " 'Darling —' " he read without emotion, " 'I've got to see you. You're breaking my heart. If you don't see me, I'll kill you.' " He took off his glasses and laid them on his desk. "You wrote that," he said.

She buried her face in her hands and her whole body shook.

"Didn't you know," Connally asked her acidly, "that Pereira changed his women like he changed his ties?"

She took her hands from her face and slowly sank back in the chair,

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staring out in front of her. "He was no good," she moaned.

"What made you think he'd stick with you?" Connally asked bitingly.

She whispered, not to him, but raptly, to herself, "He's better off dead."

"So you killed him!"

"No."

"Don't kid me," Connally said, his voice loud and heavy now, driving the words like rivets. "You went to him that night. You begged him to take you back."

"No!"

"He laughed at you. He told you you were washed up."

"No!"

"You let him have it with the Bowie knife you stole from Kit."

"I didn't."

"You kept hacking at him."

"No!"

"In and out," Connally shouted, picking up the Bowie knife from his desk and plunging it through the air again and again. "Fifteen times. In and out. In and out."

"I couldn't," she screamed. "I couldn't. I wasn't there."

"You weren't?" Connally said, and suddenly his voice was soft and low, like a mother cooing to a child. "Let's see what your husband says about that."

He turned from her and strode toward the door. She plucked at her dress and gave a little hysterical gasp. "No!" she cried. "Don't!" She sprang from the chair and ran after him. He turned around. She flung herself on him, clinging to him desperately, knotting her fingers in his clothes. "Don't! Please don't," she begged. "Leave him out of it. I'm guilty."

The music came in like a dirge.

"That was enough to send Georgia Welsh to the chair," the narrator said off the screen. "The D.A. knew it. So did Connally."

And there was Connally behind his desk, a report in front of him. Without lifting his eyes, he snapped on the intercom and said, "If he's still out there, send him in," then snapped it off and picked up a pen.

"The indictment was ready," the narrator continued. We heard the door open and close, and footsteps pad softly toward Connally's desk. "All that was needed to send Georgia Welsh on a one-way trip up the river was Connally's O.K." The pen was poised over the paper. "And Connally was ready." The pen darted down toward the paper, when a man's voice said, "Lieutenant —"

Connally's hand froze. He looked up quizzically. He said, "Well . . . ?"

The camera cut to Henry's face. He was looking down at Connally. "Lieutenant," he said casually, as if he were giving traffic directions to a stranger. "I came to sign a confession. I killed Pereira."

Henry's face curled away like a scrap of burnt paper — and Connally was on the screen again, sitting on a fountain stool at *Pop's*, worried,

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disheveled, his face covered with sooty perspiration, his eyes on a newspaper propped up in front of him, his hand gripping a half-drained glass of coke too tightly.

"So that's it, Connally," the narrator said behind the action. "One murder. Three murderers. But only one could have done it. Which one, Connally? You'd better come up with an answer — look what the papers are saying."

Connally made a bitter sound and pushed the paper away disgustedly. The camera moved back, revealing Pop leaning against the nickel-plated spouts of the fountain and watching every move Connally made. There was a cold pipe in Pop's mouth, and he was tapping the bowl automatically with the little finger of his right hand.

"You'd think, Connally," the narrator went on, "that with all their screaming, the papers would be able to tell *you* who did it. Who *did* do it, Connally? Henry Welsh? Georgia Welsh? Kit Carson?"

"I did it," said Pop.

"Will you stop tapping that pipe," Connally said irritably. "Where'd you pick up that habit anyway?"

"It's just a habit," Pop said. He pocketed the pipe.

"You did what?" Connally asked.

"I killed Pereira."

"You *what?*"

"I killed Pereira."

Connally shook his head and smiled a little sadly. "My laugh for the day," he said. "Pop, Pop!"

"I stabbed Pereira to death," Pop said.

"Sure," Connally said, and he propped up his paper again.

Pop reached out suddenly and flattened the paper with his hand. "Take me downtown," he said gravely, "and book me for murder."

"Cut it out, Pop," Connally said, "or my famous patience won't be famous much longer."

"Set those people free," Pop said loudly. "They're innocent. Don't torment them any more."

A puzzled scowl narrowed Connally's eyes and made a gash in his forehead. "You're serious?" he asked.

"Of course, I am."

"You — *killed* — Pereira?"

"I did."

"Okay, Pop," Connally said, and suddenly he was a pro working at his trade. "How did you do it? How did you bump him off?"

"I stabbed him to death."

"With Kit's knife . . . which you stole?"

"That's right."

"How did you know only one blow would kill him?"

"I aimed at his heart."

"And you left the knife in his heart and ran away?"

"I did."

"Pop . . ." Connally said wearily. "There were *fifteen* wounds . . . and we found the knife in a *garbage can.*"

Pop said quietly, "I killed Pereira."

"You know something, Pop?" Connally said, and his voice was as

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tight as a clenched fist. "You've got a complex."

Connally got up and left the store.

"But that didn't stop Pop," said the narrator off the screen. (*Pop's face stared out at us from the screen, grim and determined, looking like a child playing at being grown-up. Only the pipe which he sucked on and tapped mechanically with the little finger of his right hand gave him an adult air.*) "Pop had a cause now. He had to convince the world that he had killed Pereira.

"He sold his store." (*A workman scraped the word, POP'S, from a plate-glass window.*) "He gave most of his money to the defense fund of the Welshes and Kit Carson." (*The money was fanned out in his hand like a deck of cards, and other hands picked bills from it like birds pecking at corn.*) "He devoted all his time to trying to get himself in the death house.

"He talked to everybody — to the newspapers . . ." (*Pop, wild-eyed, defiant, and the newspapermen, tapping their temples, shaking their heads*) ". . . to the police . . ." (*Pop, pounding on a desk with his pudgy fist, and the police, impatient, annoyed, shaking their heads*) ". . . to the D.A. . . ." (*Pop, arguing, pleading, and the D.A., shrugging his shoulders, shaking his head*) ". . . to the Mayor . . ." (*Pop, humble, begging, and the Mayor, easing him out blandly, shaking his head*) "But Pop went on. He brought his fight to the people. He took newspaper ads . . . radio time . . ."

There was Pop. He was sitting behind a 1940 microphone that looked like a hamburger on a stick. His eyes were sunken and deep. "I'm a man who must be punished," he was saying quietly. "I don't remember how I killed Pereira. A man can forget things like that. The important thing is — I killed him. I want you to believe me. I'm sure you do. Please write the Mayor. Telephone your aldermen. Get in touch with . . ."

The sound ended as if it had been guillotined, and instantaneously, Pop's face vanished and Connally's office flashed on the screen.

Connally was sitting hump-backed on the wrong side of a chair, his chin grazing the back of it, slowly coming out of the ether of a shock. Now his face stiffened with anger and he jumped to his feet.

"But you can't do it!" he shouted.

"I have no choice," said the District Attorney. He was standing on the opposite side of the room — a tall, thin man in his late forties.

"What do you mean you have no choice?" Connally asked furiously. "You know Pop's a screwball. You know he gets a kick out of sacrificing himself for others."

"I know."

"Then what are you waiting for? Pop's covering up for one of them. You *know* it!"

"What would you like me to do?"

"Bring them to trial! Let a jury decide!"

A frosty smile twisted the District Attorney's lips. "Don't be childish, Connally," he said.

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"What do you mean, don't be childish?"

"Figure it out for yourself," the District Attorney said. "Suppose I did put any one of those three on trial. What do you suppose the defense would do?"

"Put Pop on the stand."

"And what would Pop testify?"

"That he killed Pereira."

"And what jury would convict Carson or the Welshes in the face of that?"

"No jury in the world," Connally said bitterly.

"And if I brought Pop to trial . . ."

"Who's being childish now?" Connally broke in.

"All right!" said the District Attorney with the triumphant dogmatism of a man who had made his point. "Let's face it. I can't get a conviction."

"All right!" Connally shouted back pugnaciously. "I'm facing it!"

Connally walked over to his desk and snapped on the intercom. "Get this," he said to it, "and get it straight the first time . . ." He broke off and threw a look at the District Attorney that was like an appeal to a higher court. The appeal was denied.

Connally twisted his head away and blazed down at the intercom. "D.A.'s orders," he said to it, jerking the words out like spittle. "Carson and the Welshes. Set them free."

"So . . ." said the narrator (*while the music came in creamy and mellow, and the rain-stained facade of the Tombs faded up on the screen*), "four people who had confessed to the crime of murder in the sovereign State of New York were permitted to go their way free and unmolested." (*Georgia came down the prison steps . . . then Henry . . . then Pop, holding Kit by the arm.*) "What happened to them? The Welshes were divorced. Georgia married again. Henry is living under an assumed name. Kit was killed in an auto accident. And Pop . . . Well, Pop is probably spreading his goodness somewhere, turning some kid's penny into a magic wand. And the Pereira case is *still unsolved!*"

The music became a curtain.

It was over.

The lights in the studio came up and applause broke out like the crackling sounds you hear when your radio goes bad. The emcee held up his hand for silence, and said to the three of us:

"Well . . . That had me on the edge of my seat. That was really exciting, wasn't it?"

We said it really was.

"Now," said the emcee, looking straight into a camera, "for the benefit of our viewers who tuned in late, let me explain the rules of our game once more. Here in the studio, we re-enact a famous unsolved crime from *real* life — yes, the Pereira case is a true story, but those were actors you saw tonight, not *real* people. . ."

We laughed.

"Anyway," said the emcee, "we

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do act the story out — and then we ask our guest expert, usually a member of the New York Police Department, to give us a solution. Then we ask *you* in the studio audience to compare *his* solution with the solutions of our three studio contestants — and if you think one of the solutions is the truth, if you think it actually solves the case, the winner will receive our giant jackpot which tonight has grown to — *fifty* — *two* — *thousand* — *dollars* in prizes!"

A hungry sound came up from the audience.

"Tonight, as you recall," the emcee went on, pointing to us, "our three contestants are: Mrs. Stephanie Kusak, housewife — Mr. Fred Wilson, clerk — and Mr. George Kirby, retired. Our guest expert is that famous metropolitan manhunter, Inspector John B. Magruder! All right, Inspector, now let's get on with 'Can You Solve This Crime?' Who was Pop protecting? Kit Carson? Georgia Welsh? Or Henry Welsh?"

Magruder said, "That's easy. Pop wasn't protecting any of them."

The emcee looked like a man who's driving along serenely at ninety miles an hour and suddenly sees a gap in the road. "Wh-a-a-t!" he cried.

"Sure," said Magruder, smiling a little. "Pop was protecting himself. He killed Pereira."

The emcee said incredulously, "Pop killed Pereira?"

"That's right. With the knife he stole from Kit."

"But the confessions . . . ?"

"Kit's confession . . ." Magruder said, his voice like a shrug. "What's the confession of an idiot worth?"

"But the Welshes, Inspector?"

"Georgia confessed," Magruder explained, "because she was sure her husband did it — and she was sure she had driven him to do it. She was sick with guilt."

"But, Inspector . . ." the emcee said, shaking his head, "asking for the electric chair just because you *feel* guilty?"

"She *wanted* to be punished," Magruder said, and now there was a touch of the lecturer in his voice. "That was the only way she could get rid of her feeling of guilt. Remember, when she confessed, she didn't say, 'I did it.' She said, 'I'm guilty.'"

"And Henry?"

"That was love," said Magruder cynically-sad, like a man remembering his youth. "He loved her, and he wanted to save her."

"That disposes of the three confessions," said the emcee with no certainty in his voice at all. "But I still don't get you, Inspector. If Pop *did* kill Pereira, why did he confess?"

"Pop was clever — really clever," Magruder said, rolling the words on his tongue like a fresh cigar, making you feel that a worthy opponent gave him a sensual delight. "Look. Pop had a reputation for sacrificing himself for others — remember? He knew that if he confessed — and threw in a couple of false details just to be on the

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safe side — nobody would believe him. Nobody did."

"But nobody *ever* suspected Pop," the emcee argued. "He didn't have to confess at all."

"He didn't confess just to save himself — although that was important," Magruder said, smiling faintly. "He confessed to save the others."

"You mean — his confession cleared himself and made it impossible to convict the other three?"

"That's right."

"I think you're pulling our leg," the emcee said.

"No," Magruder said.

"Then tell us this, Inspector — why would Pop want to kill Pereira? What motive would he have?"

"Well, Pop came from Chicago. So did Pereira. Pop's wife killed herself in Chicago. We know Pereira liked women. We think he was connected somehow . . ."

"But you don't *know*," the emcee cut in.

"We'll find out," Magruder said with quiet emphasis. "We haven't closed the case — not by a long shot! Why, we know where each of the three living suspects is right this minute."

"But you're only guessing about the motive?"

"It's the only guess that fits the facts," Magruder said patiently. "Look. Pereira skips town — comes to New York. Pop follows him . . ."

"To kill him?"

"To kill him."

"But Pop was such a kindly old man . . ."

"Was he?" And now Magruder's voice took on a whip-crack sound. "Or was he a 'kindly old man' only *after* he came to New York?"

"Only *after* . . . ?"

"Yes, only after." Magruder was trying to keep his voice polite, but you could feel the hate seeping into it. Hate for what? For Pop? For murder, terror, injustice? For himself because he hadn't solved the case? Maybe some of each. "What Pop did in New York," Magruder said, "was to build up an alibi. He spent all those years — almost five — getting himself known as 'the kindly old man' — the guy who'd give you the shirt off his back, the man who'd sacrifice himself for others. Then when the alibi was established — when he *knew* that any confession *he* made would be looked on as just an attempt on his part to shield *somebody else* — he killed Pereira!"

"Very dramatic, Inspector," the emcee said, smiling at us. "But you yourself said Pop confessed to save the others. Wasn't that the act of a good man?"

"Or the act of a man with a guilty conscience," Magruder said in the tone of a college professor. "Maybe he just didn't want another murder on his hands."

"Is that why you think Pop saved them, Inspector?"

"No, I don't," Magruder said gravely. "Pop had no remorse."

"Then why *did* he save them?"

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"Because," Magruder said, his words jerking up our brains now like a roller coaster jerks up our stomachs, "just killing and getting away with it wasn't enough for Pop. He wanted to see the people of the State of New York as powerless to do *anything* about it as . . ." He groped for a simile. ". . . as Kit. That gave him a thrill. That's why he set them free. Not because he liked them."

"But . . ." the emcee stuttered, "that's . . . that's crazy . . ."

"Sure it is," Magruder agreed. "Connally was right. Pop's a screwball. But not the way Connally thought. Just the opposite. Pop despises people. He thinks they're dirt. He thinks he can do anything with them he wants to do. Look at his progress. First, he had a neighborhood jumping through his hoop — then the police department of the biggest city in the world — then the people of the State of New York. *That's* the kick he gets out of life — treating people like puppets — not sacrificing himself for them."

"But a man like that," said the emcee, "is dangerous!"

"And free!" Magruder's voice was a fist pounding on a desk. "What he's done before, he'll do again. I'll bet right now he's got his hoop out — and the people who are jumping through it don't even know it exists. What a bang that gives him! And I'll tell you this —" Magruder said, leaning forward and pointing a finger at the emcee, "if he has to, he'll kill again."

The emcee laughed artificially. "Well . . ." he said dubiously. "That certainly is an interesting way to look at it. But I still think you're pulling our leg?"

"No, no. I'm quite serious."

"All right, Inspector," the emcee said, recovering fast, professionally jovial once again, "we'll see. Let's find out what the other contestants think about it. Which one shall we begin with? What do *you* say, Inspector? You helped select them, didn't you?"

"I picked them out myself," Magruder said matter-of-factly.

"All right, then. Which one will have the first crack at the giant jackpot, Inspector?"

"Why don't you try Mr. Kirby?" Magruder said.

That was me. I waited for the emcee to signal me to speak, and then I got the feeling you sometimes get in dreams when you're walking along the street in bright sunlight and people are looking at you queerly, not saying a word, and you look down and find yourself naked. I didn't have to look down. I knew I was sucking on an empty pipe and tapping the bowl with the little finger of my right hand. It was a peculiar habit for a man to get into.

Magruder came over and stood above me.

"Am I right . . . Pop?" he asked.

I looked up at him.

"Don't you remember, Inspector?" I said, and I'm sure my face didn't show a thing. "I confessed ten years ago."

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SPECIAL PRIZE FOR BEST RIDDLE STORY: PETER GODFREY

Peter Godfrey, a South African writer of enormous promise for the future (and creator of that wily and philosophic detective, Rolf le Roux), submitted an almost unclassifiable story in last year's contest — and yet so fine and so vital and so memorable a story that we felt compelled to invent a special classification for it, and award it a special prize.

The story is a parcel of paradoxes. For consider: it is indisputably not a detective story — and yet there is a problem posed at the end of the tale that perhaps only a detective could solve; it is not, in the usual sense, a crime story — and yet there is a murder in the story; the identity of the murderer is known, the motive and the method are perfectly clear to the reader — and yet "The Lady and the Dragon" is a mystery story, with a mystery so profound as perhaps to defy explanation, even interpretation.

Have we whetted your appetite? All right, we will not detain you further. We suggest only that you read this story in the mood of "The Lady, or the Tiger?" Unlike that classic riddle, "The Lady and the Dragon" asks no question in its final sentence — but your Editors will!

THE LADY AND THE DRAGON

by PETER GODFREY

She was in a hurry to get to Knysna, and yet she stopped the car. Nor did she know why she stopped it. It's not the scenery, she told herself. My art is to photograph people, enjoying themselves, working in sewers, dying of disease. How could my attention be attracted by a bit of pretty-pretty landscape?

But even while she rationalized, she knew her analysis was wrong. The scenery wasn't pretty-pretty — it was awe-inspiring; there was something about it that seemed to thrust its way through her eyes into her mind. Besides, there were no birds.

The valley fell away from the road in a great sweep, dwarfing the giant trees into the semblance of a lush carpet. Then, on the other side, the massive green leaped up to the sky, concave seeming, like a wave about to engulf.

No birds and no insects, and the air was still, and yet from out the heart of the wave she could sense a rolling beat, like a soundless drum.

She unslung her camera, fitted a telescopic lens with practiced fingers, and did not know why she did so. There's no photograph there, she told herself, no composition in the small

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field of vision of a camera, no contrast in the masses of green.

All the same, she brought the viewfinder to her eye and swept the camera slowly round. Only trees, shapeless trees, and more trees; yet she knew she would take a picture. Then suddenly she found a spot, a deep gash in the opposite mountain. Some contrast at least, she thought. Not good, but it may help me recapture the mood.

Even though the mood was one of unease . . .

She pressed the shutter release, but the second before she did so her muscles jerked, altering the angle of the camera, focusing it on a patch of forest to the left of the gap.

She felt irritated and vaguely shaken. Now she *had* to take a picture. She held the camera firmly, sighted the gap again, and pressed the shutter release. But again her muscles jerked involuntarily.

In a swift movement she re-entered the car, slammed the door, started driving. There was something at the back of her mind which she first took for panic, and then suddenly knew for excitement.

Fool, she thought, acting like a fool — like a kid overpowered by atmosphere, not a woman of sense and experience. There's nothing there, not even a good photograph; all I've done is waste time and two exposures.

She was very annoyed with herself.

The manager of the hotel, a dapper Swiss, showed her to her table and introduced her to the two men who would keep her company at meals. "Professor Munnik, Dr. Penner," he said, "Miss Carlton."

She liked the professor immediately; his eyes were warm beneath the shock of white hair. About fifty, she thought, perhaps a little more, but he carries his years well.

Dr. Penner was fair and younger; she did not try to analyze her opinions about him.

"Carlton?" said the professor. "I saw an exhibition of photographs by Mary Carlton in Cape Town last month. You aren't —?" There was genuine pleasure in his face when she nodded.

Dr. Penner said: "I suppose, as a photographer you must have stopped for pictures at least a dozen times between George and here?"

"Why, no," she said. "I'm not really a landscape photographer, you see."

That was all she meant to say, but the nagging insistence in her mind made her go on. "I did stop once, though, and took a couple of pictures. I'm afraid they're not going to be very good. I had rather a queer experience."

She told them about it. "Somehow, I can't get the incident out of my mind. I don't know why — I came here to have a holiday, to forget about photography. I only brought my camera because — well, there are things I must have with me, like clothes or a handbag. And now I feel I won't rest until those exposures are

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developed. I know they'll look like nothing on earth. There was something about the place. . . . This may sound silly, but it's true. It was as though it had been waiting for me for a long time, and I knew I was expected."

"*Deja vu*," said Dr. Penner, and she looked at him inquiringly.

The professor laughed. "Don't let him mystify you," he said. "His doctorate isn't in medicine or even anything remotely scientific. He's a psychologist, and he's probably just applied some completely outlandish classification to you from the depths of his jargon. What was it you said, Penner?"

"*Deja vu*. That's the name psychologists — who are incidentally very scientific fellows, despite what the professor says — apply to the feeling that you have seen a place before, even when you know you've never really been there."

She was still curious.

"That's it, yes," she said, "but how does it come about? What causes the feeling?"

Dr. Penner grinned. "I see I will have to give you a lecture. In your unconscious mind there are many desires and urges — complexes — which you cannot perceive consciously because they have been repressed in your childhood. In your dreams and in your waking fantasies, though, these urges do slip past the censorship, but in a disguised form. They adopt a symbolism — if you dream of a tree, for instance, it might stand for an infantile desire to go screaming through the drawing-room with jam on your face, or hatred for one of your parents, or one of the other things you have been forced to repress. Each person has his own particular symbols for his own complexes. Then suddenly, by coincidence, you come on physical objects arranged in a pattern, and those objects and that pattern are symbolic of your repressions in a vivid form. That is why you get the feeling you have seen a place before, although you don't know where or when."

She shook her head slowly. "No," she said. "No. Not this feeling I had."

"All the same, that is the true explanation."

Deep inside her she knew the psychologist was wrong.

"Prove it," she challenged, and saw the professor smile delightedly. "Of what particular complex of mine was this landscape symbolic?"

"Just a minute," said Dr. Penner, and smiled in his turn. "It can't be done on the spur of the moment — that would be unscientific. No, before I come to a conclusion, I might have to ask you a great many questions."

"What sort of questions?"

"Oh, various things. The impressions that came into your mind when you first saw the scene —"

"I'll tell you that. It was as though the valley was untouched, as though humanity had never set foot there. There is a phrase for what I mean, but I just can't think of it."

"Virgin forest?" suggested the professor.

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"Yes. Virgin forest. Next question, doctor?"

But Dr. Penner held up his hand placatingly. "Not now," he said, "and not here. If you feel tomorrow that you still want to know, I'll do my best to oblige you. Only," he said, "we must be alone. How can anyone do a serious scientific investigation with the professor grinning like a Cheshire cat?"

"All right — but just tell me one thing. The movements which made me turn my camera, and now this consuming curiosity to see the prints — is all that psychological? Does it all spring from within myself?"

"Yes."

"I find it very difficult to believe that," she said.

She tossed and turned for hours that night, and when she did sleep there was all the time a pressing urgency in her to wake up. She dressed early, long before breakfast, and went out to sit on the broad veranda.

The manager came over to chat to her, and she asked him if he knew where she could obtain the use of a photographic dark room.

"Why, yes," he said. "I have a friend, and I am sure that he will help you, but he will not be up yet, you understand? I will telephone him later and let you know."

He came to her later, just as the breakfast gong was booming, and handed her a slip of paper on which was written an address.

"You may go at any time," he told her, and gave her detailed directions on how to get there.

The dark room was attached to a studio on an island in the lagoon, and she hired a skiff to carry her across. She was glad to find the photographer was not curious; he showed her where to go and disappeared somewhere in the back of the building.

Carefully she removed the film from the camera and developed it. She made contact prints, took them still wet from the fixing bath, and carried them to the light.

The tiny rectangles were very dark; still, something of what she had photographed was apparent.

She put both negatives under the enlarger and made large prints.

The two photographs were not of the same spot, although they must have been adjacent to each other. She examined the first carefully, and then put it aside. In the second she thought she saw something, and peered at it through a powerful magnifying glass.

In an ecstasy of certainty she marked out a portion of the picture on the negative — a square of about two inches — and put it back to enlarge to whole-plate size.

The definition, of course, suffered badly. What had appeared on the original as solid black was now vague and full of blurs and uncertain lines — a rain-on-the-glass pattern of distortion.

But she knew what she was looking for — the form in the formlessness — and traced it out with the naked eye.

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It was magnificent, yet terrifying and unmistakable.

The head!

Trembling with a cold fever, she went back to the hotel.

She found the professor and Dr. Penner on a settee in the corner of the lounge, and took the easy chair facing them.

Penner asked, with an amused glint in his eye, "Developed your photographs yet?"

She nodded, very seriously. "Yes. This is an enlargement of a portion of the original print. I'd like you to look at it very carefully."

They bent their heads together, studying it. Her impatience got the better of her. "Can't you see it?"

Penner leaned back and shook his head regretfully. "I'm sorry. I can't make head or tail out of it. It looks like a jigsaw puzzle to me."

She felt frustrated and desolate. "And you, Professor?"

"Nothing," he said. "Of course, my eyes are not what they used to be."

She checked herself from protesting. "Just a minute," she said, and with a pencil on the back of another photograph she sketched what she had seen, divorced from its background, but of the same size and in the same position as on the original.

The effect of the drawing on the professor was electric. He sat up, drew in the air sharply between his teeth, and traced an outline with his finger on the photograph. "Yes," he said. "Yes." And then, "I see it now. Quite clearly. It was these other blurs and lines which made me confused." He handed the drawing and photograph to Penner.

"But what is it?" she asked. "What is it?"

The excitement in the professor's voice matched hers. "I know, but I am almost afraid to say it. It is a great scientific discovery. Many hundreds of thousands of years ago, when the world was very young, there existed enormous creatures of which you have heard — the brachiosaurus and others. There was one among them which preyed on the rest, which was stronger and fiercer than any of the others. It was called Tyrannosaurus Rex. It is the head of a tyrannosaurus that appears there on your photograph."

He paused only a second, and added, "We must go to this valley."

"Wait a moment," said Penner. "Before we start rushing into things, there are one or two objections I would like to make. First of all, I'm not perfectly satisfied that there is any sort of head in this photograph."

"But I *see* it!" objected the professor.

"You see it now. You didn't see it before. I also see it now, but I'm by no means convinced."

She felt a great wave of irritation. "What do you mean?"

"Have you ever heard of *gestalt?* No, I see you haven't. Well, let me explain it, then. Give a person an ordinary shapeless ink blot and ask him what he sees in it. Immediately his

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mind begins to view the blot in terms of a pattern, one common and familiar to him. If, at the same time, you suggest that there is a similarity to a donkey, he will be predisposed to look for a donkey. Here you have given us a sketch of a tyrannosaurus and a shapeless blur in which you say it is — and the chances are ten to one we will see a tyrannosaurus. Especially," he added, "since one of us is an eminent naturalist, who'd probably give his right arm for the sight of such a creature."

"Theory," said the professor, "and very tortuous theory at that. There is a much simpler one which conforms more closely to the facts — that there is actually the head of a tyrannosaurus in the picture."

Dr. Penner shrugged. "I said I was not certain. You may be right — but so may I."

She broke in eagerly. "Don't you see, Dr. Penner, that you *must* be wrong? I'm not a naturalist — I didn't even know what the creature was — but I saw it all the same."

"I have a theory about that too," he said quietly, "but I won't bring it up now. There's another thing I want to query. Let's assume there is a tyrannosaurus. Can you explain why this one is still alive when the rest of its species died thousands of centuries ago?"

"Alive?" expostulated the professor. "Who said anything about that? What Miss Carlton has photographed is a perfect or near-perfect fossil of the creature!"

But she shook her head. "You're wrong, Professor. It *is* alive! I feel it. And it's got — no, intelligence isn't quite what I mean — it has some form of mental power. I've felt it ever since I stopped to take those photographs — it forced me to go and develop the film. And now I can feel, deep inside me, an urge to return, to go back to the spot I photographed. How else can that be explained?"

Penner said abruptly, "You haven't answered my question. How is it possible for this creature to be alive?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. Isn't just the fact of its existence enough? Perhaps — well, I told you my impression of the valley, that it had been isolated, untouched for centuries — perhaps they have never died out there. Or what do we know about how long their natural life-span was? Perhaps, this is one of the original species?"

"And its mental power?" went on Penner, relentlessly. "As far as I remember, the tyrannosaurus had a brain about the size of a pea."

"Aha!" said the professor triumphantly. "What has that got to do with it? Didn't you tell me yourself the other night that the theory that intelligence depended on brain size could never be considered valid, because Anatole France had a brain smaller than a Bushman's? Miss Carlton's theories may be as imaginative as yours, but at least they are based on facts of experience. For myself, I believe there is a gigantic fossil in the valley — nothing more. But I have an

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open mind, and I am going there tomorrow to make sure."

"And I," said Penner, "am going there to prove you wrong."

They made plans for the expedition over the lunch table, and the professor left to make the necessary preparations in the town.

She walked to the veranda and stood a long time staring at the glimpse of the lagoon down the road and at the little church with its graveyard opposite.

By herself like that, she had content, a mind crowded with a patient ecstasy of anticipation. Then Dr. Penner came to join her, and she felt lonely and afraid.

He must have sensed something of this, because his first words were almost an apology. "I must speak to you," he said.

"Yes?"

"About this trip tomorrow. There are things I feel I should tell you."

"Yes?"

"Do you remember our conversation last night, when you asked me to analyze your complex? May I do that now?"

She hesitated. "All right — if it amuses you. But don't expect me to accept your theories unconditionally. What do you want me to do?"

"I'm going to ask you a few questions — personal ones. I want you to answer them candidly and truthfully. How old are you, Miss Carlton?"

There was just a shade of defiance in her voice. "Thirty-five."

"I take it, at your age, you're continually thinking about getting married?"

"You're not quite right there. Naturally, I do think about it sometimes — but 'continually' is definitely an overstatement. I want you to understand, also, that I am single today by my own choice, not through any lack of opportunity."

"That, of course, is obvious — you're a very attractive woman. Let me say rather that Mr. Right has not yet come along, but that you wish he would?"

"Yes, that's more accurate."

"Then I want to go further and suggest that when you decided to come here on holiday, the hope of meeting Mr. Right was one of your deeper motives?"

"Yes, one of them. Another, and much more important one, was that I'd been overworking and needed a holiday."

She waited for his next question, but this time his voice did not rise in query at the end of the sentence. It was conversational, casual, a bare statement of fact.

"St. George and the dragon," he said.

The remark was so out of context, so apparently inconsequential, she should have felt amused, and was annoyed at herself because she wasn't. Behind her annoyance was a prickle of shock.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"Your complex. Oh, it's very plain

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to me, but I must make it just as plain to you. Listen. What you are fixated on is the idea of romance — that very young and childish idea. The maiden rescued by the Knight from terrible peril. St. George and the dragon."

"Do you really believe this nonsense?"

"It's the truth. Let me show you step by step. Why did the valley attract your attention? You couldn't think of the phrase to describe it — remember? — and that's also significant. Virgin forest. Two meanings there — land untrodden by man, and the forest where the virgin is in peril of the dragon. Don't sneer. That's what your unconscious mind thought. That's why you moved involuntarily — so you could photograph a portion of the landscape where there was little or no definition. To satisfy your complex you had to find a dragon, and that was the only way. You found one because you were looking for it."

She repeated, "Nonsense," but he kept on speaking.

"I'm telling you this because I'm afraid for you. Afraid of the strength of your obsession. Afraid of what it may do to you tomorrow when you find no trace whatever of the tyrannosaurus. Oh, you don't believe me, but think it over. Now. Tonight. And especially tomorrow."

She felt angry but quite cold, and her voice slapped him in the face. "Dr. Penner, do you know you're behaving like an overwrought schoolboy? I have never in my life heard such preposterous nonsense as your analysis of me. You've disobeyed all the laws of logic in your theory, given the wrong values to some facts and completely disregarded others, because they don't fit in with your preconceived ideas. Like the fact that although I've never seen a picture of a tyrannosaurus, or even heard the name of the creature, I was able to make a recognizable sketch of it."

"You've forgotten — but of course you had seen a drawing somewhere. You *must* have! You may not even have been conscious of it — just caught a glimpse somewhere — but enough for your unconscious mind to perceive the dragon symbolism."

She laughed out loud. "Your logic astounds me. Because you don't see another reason, therefore, there cannot be another reason. Tell me, Doctor, what makes you take so much trouble over me? Why is it so necessary for you to pry into my mind?"

He looked at her very gravely. "I will tell you some day — but not now."

"You won't or you cannot? I wonder. You see, Doctor, you've also got a complex, which is just as obvious to me as mine seems to you. A psychology complex. Everything you see and hear is distorted by you in terms of your pet subject. More than a complex, Dr. Penner — an obsession."

"I wish you were right," he said.

She had laughed at him, yes. But what was it he had left unsaid?

His theory was fantastic, ridiculous, unscientific. She knew her own mind

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— how well she knew it! Or did she? She had to be alone, get away from the hotel, think it out for herself.

She took the car along the road to Port Elizabeth, watching, but not knowing for what. At least, not until she found it.

It was a valley, a sheer sweep from the road, giant trees, and a towering mountain opposite. Except for the house at the bottom of the slope it was identical with the landscape that called to her.

She got out of the car, stood on the edge of the road, and let the wind ruffle her hair.

This valley meant nothing to her. And so it provided proof that Dr. Penner must be wrong. Here it was, a valley, mountains and trees — the same perfect symbolism that he said had excited her complex. And yet she was unmoved.

She should have felt elation, satisfaction, only she couldn't because of the house. It spoiled the picture. There were people living here: that was the difference.

She half-closed her eyes, so that the house below her was obscured, and filled her mind with the memory of the other valley. Then the house didn't matter any more. Nothing mattered except a point in the viewfinder of her camera, a head on a photographic print.

She turned the car, went home, and was very silent at dinner. So was Dr. Penner, but the professor chatted excitedly about the morning.

She went to bed early.

And dreamed.

She was a cave-dweller, dressed in skins, and Penner and the professor were there, too, and all three of them were thrusting desperately against a huge rock at the mouth of their cave, to save themselves from something monstrous pushing on the other side. And all the time their muscles were like lead, and Penner, clumsy, hindered their efforts. Then suddenly she and the professor were alone, gradually being forced back. The stone jerked, hurling them aside. The monster walked through, and the monster was Penner.

Foolish and fantastic and meaningless. Yet she woke sobbing . . .

They set out early in the morning, loaded with knapsacks, and she was in a fever of impatience because the professor was driving, and he was driving too slowly.

Then they were there, parking the car, climbing out with their gear. On the lip of the descent the professor turned and faced them. In that second she saw him as a picture, with the shock of white hair like a patriarch's, the keen eyes, the wrinkled neck protruding from the khaki shirt, the strangely youthful legs below the shorts.

"In a few hours we'll know," he said, and then added, "I found out something about this place in town yesterday. There's a man living in town who, they say, is over a hundred years old. He told me he knew about this valley — that it was haunted, and

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that no person has ever set foot in it. He had a name for it, too — *Drakensvallei* — the Valley of the Dragon; but he could not tell me why it had been given that name."

The going was not easy, but it was not as bad as they had expected. She felt a pleasurable yearning grow with every step; the professor sang, even Penner became quite animated.

He twitted her about the little pearl-handled pistol she carried. "A pop-gun," he said. "I doubt whether it would kill a man, let alone a tyrannosaurus."

"You'd be surprised what damage this thing can do," she told him, "and I'm a very good shot. I didn't bring it for the tyrannosaurus, though. There may be other things here. Snakes, for instance."

There was a snake, and she did shoot it, but not before it had buried its fangs deep in the professor's youthful leg.

Penner called urgently, "Have you got a knife?" but she could only shake her head. He cursed, tore a tin of sardines from a knapsack, opened it, and used the metal to cut a great gash in the vicinity of the wound. Then he applied his lips.

She winced, stared, and began to see nothing.

"No use," said the professor, "Mamba."

A little later he tried to say something else, but his paralyzed larynx only made animal sounds.

Penner, perspiration pouring down his face, leaned over the old man. "What did you say? George, talk to me! Try again! I'm listening."

But there was no life in the twisted lips, no breath even to expel guttural noises . . .

She stood there, gun in hand, her consciousness sliding into ever narrowing focus.

Penner rose. "We must report this. I'll stay here. Go back, take the car, and fetch the police."

He became aware of the expression on her face. "Do you hear me?"

She spoke then, not in answer to his question, but in tones full of lingering wonderment. "So his name was George," she said.

He tried to grasp her arm, but she shook herself away and stood staring at something in the far distance; in reality, her lids were pricking with the narrowness of her concentration.

She said very simply, "It is calling me," and he felt a flash of panic.

"Wait," he said. "Listen. I know — believe me, I know — just how strong this obsession is with you. But please — concentrate on this — it is *only* an obsession! There is no tyrannosaurus — except in your mind. The professor is lying here dead. You must go back."

She shook her head, and did not know she was shaking it.

"No," he said with decision, "no. You wanted to know yesterday — now I must tell you. I can't let you go on. I'm afraid. Afraid because I . . . love you, Mary."

There was a swirling mist that obscured him; she could only see his

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eyes. They were very blue and wide apart and intense. Her finger moved, just a slight movement, and then he had a third eye. She was not even conscious of the noise of the shot.

He slid down into the mist and she went forward, stumbling over him, but not knowing she had stumbled.

Sometimes she ran and sometimes she walked, but there was no consciousness of physical weariness when she slowed her pace. There was no consciousness of anything except a pulse in her brain, a single pulse, reverberating, not with pain but with power. And as she went forward, the power grew, slowly exploding into soundless thunder, echoes concussing ever more and more, and those concussions mushrooming into greater beats.

She stopped when she knew she had to.

It was in a glade, and she peered upward expectantly to see what must be there. Her mind was heavy, feathered, and she knew a great sorrow because she could see nothing. Then there was a hint of movement in the trees, a swelling and gasping of the air, and she realized with a sudden flush of triumph that some things cannot be seen because they are too big.

She felt a mighty eye upon her, a red moon, and the beams trembled into her with a knowledge, a certainty of a presence, a consciousness of unhumanity and potent great age.

She called out, "What do you want of me?"

The pulsations in her brain fluttered and boomed telepathically, forced themselves down habitual neural patterns, twisted into her consciousness in the familiar form of words. *I am very pleased you have come.*

She wondered why It was pleased, and even with the thought the answer came, blurting from the pulse in high-toned spasms of power, so that the words they shaped in her brain were ringing echoes in her ears:

I am very, very hungry.

"The Lady, or the Tiger?" asked the now famous question: "Which came out of the opened door, — the lady, or the tiger?" Now that you have finished reading "The Lady and the Dragon," we ask an entirely different question: "Did the prehistoric monster actually exist — or was the tyrannosaurus only in the lady's mind?"

Now you know why we finally classified Mr. Godfrey's tale as a riddle story . . .

To Mr. Godfrey himself, the largest element of horror in his own story is that there was much more truth in it than you could possibly guess — or perhaps believe. The Valley of the Dragon and all the legends about it actually exist. If you should ever travel in the eastern Cape Province of South Africa, you will find the Valley alongside an abandoned road near

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Knysna. Peter Godfrey stumbled across it, after losing his way on an automobile tour, and like the lady in his story he was absolutely transfixed by its atmosphere. Also like the lady, Mr. Godfrey tried twice to photograph the Valley, and twice his muscles twitched involuntarily.

That night — before, *mind you, he even knew there were legends surrounding the Valley* — *Mr. Godfrey dreamed the succeeding episodes in his strange tale. He dreamed that he developed the photographic print, enlarged and re-enlarged it, and then traced the outline of THE HEAD. He had no idea what it was, except that it was horribly large and gigantically horrible, even beyond his wildest imagining.*

The image of THE HEAD haunted Mr. Godfrey after he woke. The next day he heard the legends, and for weeks after that he could not get the Valley or its terrifying inhabitant out of his mind. Then one evening he visited a model farm near Graaff Reinet in the northern Cape. The owner of the farm, Mr. George Rubidge, expressed a keenness to show Mr. Godfrey the room in which he practiced his hobby. Mr. Rubidge opened a door, switched on the light, and Mr. Godfrey entered — and literally jumped a foot off the floor! Staring at him from the opposite wall was THE HEAD!

It was a plaster cast, of course. Mr. Rubidge's hobby was paleontology, and this was one of the exhibits in his private museum.

The hairs on Mr. Godfrey's neck are still tingling . . .

ESP, asks Mr. Godfrey? Perhaps one day he will find out, and then — as Frank Stockton eventually did with "The Lady, or the Tiger?" — Mr. Godfrey may write a sequel to "The Lady and the Dragon."

No, your Editors do not know the answer. We cannot help you to decide whether the prehistoric monster existed in the flesh or only in the lady's mind . . .

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CAB, MISTER?

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

WHEN he heard the soprano hail he snapped his head around, gave me what they call the double-take. He looked once, then twice to make sure he'd seen straight the first time. I coasted up beside him, pulled out my door.

I knew what was coming next. I got it twenty times a day out loud. The rest of the time they just took root on the curb and stared like I was some freak out of a sideshow. I beat him to the punch to get it over with quicker. "Yes, I'm a she-cab-driver," I said wearily, "but my brakes work just as good as anybody else's; they don't know the difference."

He acted undecided, like most of them did once they'd spotted me. Some never tumbled at all if I kept my mouth shut. I pack my hair up under my cap when I'm driving so as not to frighten the horses.

"I've got to eat like everyone else," I built him up patiently. That almost always worked. "Where to, mister? Or don't you care to trust yourself to my driving?"

"Well I'll be damned!" he muttered. But he went ahead and climbed in. "Pier 10, North River."

I'd picked him up in front of a fashionable men's residence club on upper Madison. He didn't have any baggage with him, but why was that my business? Too long a haul to pass up, even if I had to slug him to get him in. I bent down my pennant and started off. The match-flare behind me told me he was taking the usual hinge at my license. They all did that; it's a wonder the isinglass shield over it didn't wear out from being lamped so much. Thank God, the photo was enough to turn milk sour; that made most of them lose all further interest then and there.

"Virginia O'Dare," he read out loud. I just kept my eyes on the traffic. "Married?"

I got that twenty times a day too. Most of the time it wasn't meant personally, just idle curiosity, but it was a pain in the neck just the same. "You get driven, you don't get answered," I said, business-like.

"You seem to know your way around," he muttered. "What'll they be doing next, stoking fires on ships?"

I'm no fortune-teller despite thirty-four years of batting around my native New York, so I let that one go by. He saw he wasn't getting anywhere, so he kept quiet — for the next three blocks, anyway. Then he tapped his nail on the glass behind my right ear.

"Yes?" I said grudgingly.

"Got a passenger on your rear fender."

The mirror didn't show anything,

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so I craned my neck out and around and took a quick look back in mid-traffic, which is no way to handle a wheel. A tousled little kid's head popped back out of sight when he saw me.

I had a lot of this stowing-away to contend with, more than most drivers on account of the cut of my jib. "Mrs. Barney Oldfield" they called me around my neighborhood and seemed to think I was in business to provide free transportation for the whole juvenile population. But hardly ever this far out of bounds or this late at night.

I couldn't do anything about it until I got a red light. Then I jumped out, whisked around to the back, uttering shrill blood-curdling imprecations and swatting my open hand — at nothing. Those gamins are always too quick to be caught by a flanking movement like that. He was two whole car-lengths away already, standing there jeering at me from the curb. It was the Rooney kid from next door, the one that poured ashes into my radiator valve that time.

"You limb of Satan," I shrilled, "I'll break every bone in your body if I get my hands on you! I'll turn every one of those freckles into a bruise! What're you doing way down here? I'm going to turn you over to the first cop I see!"

"I been riding you all night and you never knew it!" he taunted. "Yay! Mrs. Barney Oldfield! Your pants is comin' down!" And then to my passenger, "Hey mister! Why don't ya get a *real* driver? Wait'll she sees a mouse!" Which was unjust! I'm not afraid of mice.

I was licked and I knew it; I always was, in every one of my encounters with them in this unending guerrilla warfare that had been going on for months. The light had turned green again, and there was a gallery of other motorists taking in the whole thing — and particularly me — with huge enjoyment, and even my passenger was grinning appreciatively out the back port-hole.

I was handicapped by not being able to use the right language, for one thing; I wasn't well enough versed in it and it probably wouldn't have synchronized convincingly with the pitch of my voice. I got in and slammed off again. They were going to keep it up, those brats, until one of them fell off and got run over; then I'd probably be held responsible. I didn't give him the satisfaction of looking back any more to see whether he'd jumped on again or not. That was what he wanted, to play hide-and seek.

At the next light, my fare said suddenly, "Your radio work?"

I snapped it on, said "What d'you want?"

"Krindler," he said, "it's nine-fifteen."

I tuned in to the "Gotham-through-a-knot-hole" broadcast, but didn't bother listening to the familiar staccato flashes and teletype-tapping. I don't approve of cab radios, any more than I do those ventilators in

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the roof, but I had both; they seem to be what the customers want. Next, I suppose, they'll be installing sandwich-slots and coffee-taps.

As we went on again he was crouched forward on the edge of his seat drinking in the spiel eagerly. There's an ordinance against turning them on too loud, or if there isn't there ought to be; I don't believe in it anyway. It distracts you driving through heavy traffic and you're liable to pile yourself up on the guy ahead before you know it.

"Give it more juice," he said abruptly, "I want to get this!" That's how I knew when something came up that interested him.

"Did you hire a cab or a broadcasting studio?" I asked coldly, but I tuned it in a little clearer. I got a load myself, against my better judgment, just to see what it was he wanted to hear so bad.

"Flash! New York: What well known playboy around town got taken for too much, too many nights in a row, at a floating gambling game he's been haunting for weeks? They say he is ready for the cleaners as a result, and is threatening to squawk if restitution isn't made. Carbolic is another good way of committing suicide, mister, and a whole lot easier!"

Behind me I heard him growl a couple of the words I should have used on the Rooney kid back there and hadn't known how to put together; presumably about what he'd just heard.

"Kill it!" he rasped. "The —— know-it-all, always shooting off his yap!"

"Keep it clean," I remonstrated, and squelched it for him.

By way of apologizing for his careless language he gave me a halfway explanation, that I hadn't asked for and didn't want.

"I happen to know the guy he was just talking about, and whatever he is, he's not a poor loser or a snitcher. This wisenheimer can get him in wrong two ways by saying what he just did, with the people that got his money, and by giving him a bum write-up to all his friends in the bargain!"

"That so?" I said down the back of my neck. You should have been able to see my frosty breath on the air like in winter.

He shut up in a glowering sulky silence, and didn't say anything more after that for the rest of the ride.

I nearly had a slight accident with him a couple of blocks farther on. Some bronco-buster who mistook the avenue for a rodeo, swerved dizzily out at me, coming my way, to get ahead of the car in front of him. I threw my wheel over like a discus, and I don't think you could have got a razor blade between the two fenders, but you know the old one about a miss being as good as a mile. Then to add insult to injury, the bronc-buster backfired in our left ears. As soon as I was sure I wasn't going up on the sidewalk I gandered back. I couldn't see the license plate through

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the dirty black exhaust trailing behind the car.

I said, "You got any teeth left?"

He smirked without saying anything, so I let it go at that. His blurred face in the glass showed a sort of lopsided grin on it as the recurrent streetlights flowed and ebbed across it. "Great sense of humor!" I thought to myself.

I hugged the inside lane from then on, so that nothing like that would happen again. This brought on something else in a minute; it seemed to be quite an eventful little ride, all in all. We came abreast of a cheesy little honkytonk clip-joint of some kind, with a bright neon sign over it that read: Butch's Idle Hour. The light ahead had already gone red so I was slowing anyway.

There was a girl wavering there on the sidewalk, all dolled-up like Mrs. Astor's pet horse (or vice versa) and apparently three sheets to the wind. She seemed to know what she wanted, though, and what she wanted was a cab, in the worst way. No sign of a doorman or anything, but maybe he was scouting around for something to pour her into and get her off his hands. She kept swaying there on the curb, over-balancing, stepping down, then reeling back up again.

The minute she saw me she started to whoop: "Cab! Cab!" and took a flying leap off the curb. She landed on the running-board with one silver slipper, the other poised stiffly out behind her.

"I'm taken, haven'tcha got eyes?" I snarled. "What d'ye think this is, an excursion train?"

"I gotta get away from there," she drooled, clinging like a strap-hanger in the subway while I braked to a stop. "There's a guy after me in there —" She'd got the door open meanwhile, without knocking herself off, and was dropping ingratiatingly in on him. "Gimme a lift, will you, mister, just down a couple blocks? He's gonna come out in a minute when he misses me —"

My fare was too startled to answer, just stared at her. I decided it was up to me to take personal charge of the situation.

I got out and came around behind her. "No, you don't, girlie. Against the company rules. You either get a whole one of your own or else stem it home. You look like you've had a lot of practice walking the streets anyway. Come on now, don't make me get rough."

I grabbed her by the back of the neck and where they used to wear bustles, extracted her like a burr, and deposited her on the sidewalk. With that, she started to run, fast and straight as an arrow, giving me scared looks back over her shoulder, until she'd turned the corner.

I got in again, remarked: "Wonder what her racket was? She didn't want a cab, and she wasn't drunk either."

All he said was "Humph," or maybe it was the springs of the seat under him.

My clock was at two-ninety-five when I finally veered in under the

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pier-shed with him, and I was mentally rubbing my hands together. I decided I'd go coy on him, pull a crack I used once in a while: "That wasn't so bad now, was it?" It ought to be good for a four-bit hand out, with the ante this high. I let my clock make an even three before I finally killed it, and he didn't catch on. I opened the door for him back-hand, and said: "Here's your pier, mister."

He just sat there looking at it, a bar of silver from a near-by arc-light striking his face.

I waited a couple of seconds, hinted: "Change your mind, mister?" He wasn't fumbling for any money or anything.

I started to get sore. I turned all the way around on the seat, faced him: "It's a nice view, but I can't stay here all night. Are you getting out or aren't you?"

He didn't seem to hear me.

I gritted, "Why didn't I stick to dress-making?" I got out, and went back to him in a towering rage. It takes a lot to get me that way, but when I get, I get. First the Rooney kid, then the near-accident, then the hustler, and now a fare who played 'possum.

I reached in and pushed the flat of my hand hard against his chest, dead center. He had on a slippery satin tie. As I did so, his eyes, which had been open until now with a dopey look in them, fluttered closed and stayed that way.

Something made me take my hand away, without pulling him out by the shirt-front like I'd intended. That "something" was my hand which was all wet. That wasn't a slippery satin tie, that was a rough-textured tie that was all blood. I dug for a handkerchief and said aloud:

"Holy smoke, the guy's had a puncture!"

I got in with him, knuckled his heart. It was as still as my meter. He must have died just now, as my hand flattened against him. Why hadn't he told me something was the matter with him? I might have been able to get to a hospital with him in time, save him.

I jumped out again, closed the door on him, got back under the wheel. A fine how-dye-do, driving a stiff around town, like I was a hearse! There was no help to be had here, around this pier; I decided to go straight to the nearest police station with him.

I got out of there in a hurry, with his face in the mirror before my eyes the whole time, to give me a nice cheerful ride. Three dollars worth of gas and haulage shot to hell, my upholstery maybe all smeared up in the bargain right after I'd had it cleaned!

The nearest precinct house was in the lower West Twenties. I drove up, parked with mathematical precision exactly between the two green lamp posts, left him where he was and went in.

The desk lieutenant could only see me from the waist up. He gave me a sort of reproachful look at first, like I was nothing but a big sissy and ought to be ashamed of myself.

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I thumbed the door, said: "I got a cab outside with a dead guy in it. What'll I do with him?"

When he heard my voice, he reared up in his chair to take a look down over the top of his desk, and saw what I ended in.

"I'm up here, not down there," I pointed out impatiently. "I said I've got a dead man outside in my hack."

He finally got over his doubts at what heading I came under, and picked up a phone. He said into it: "Kelsey, come out here a minute."

An Irish job without a tie came out of the back room, shrugging into his coat. He was holding a razor-strop in one hand, but he hadn't been shaving. He put it down to go back to it later.

"This cab-driver claims there's a stiff outside in a machine —"

Kelsey turned around, looked across my shoulder at the bare wall in back of us. "What cab-driver?" he said.

I thumped myself resoundingly on the chest; I was getting shorter tempered by the minute. These shenanigans were costing me the cream of the after-theater pickings. "This one!" I said, "X-ray Eyes."

"Go out there and take a look," the lieutenant said. And to two big lunks in blue hanging around gawking at me: "Give him a hand — if there is a stiff."

"If!" I snapped. I'd never met such a skeptical outfit in my life. I went out with them. All I needed now for a perfect evening was to find the cab empty, discover the guy had come to and walked away by himself while I was in there. But there he was, big as life. Or, big as death, I should say. Still sitting upright too, supported by the angle between the back of the cab and its side wall.

Kelsey fingered him from the running-board. "Yeah, he's dead," he announced.

"Sure he's dead!" I resented. "I used to be a life-saver at a beach, I ought to know how to tell heart-and pulse-action!"

Kelsey clicked a flash, played it in the cab. "Keep them people back," he said to the cops. "I wanna see what this is before we move him." The neighbors were starting to inch down off their stoops and fire-escapes to find out what was going on.

"And don't bounce your night-stick on my paint!" I added. "I don't own this job, I only rent it!"

Kelsey was undoing the guy's shirt-front, spreading it open with two fingers under the icy light of the torch. Liquid red showed through.

"Bullet-hole," he said. I'd never seen one before, so I didn't argue with him. I wondered how he could tell, though. He turned the torch down around the floor. Nothing down there but the guy's shoes. I asked him what he was looking for.

"Trying to find out if he bumped himself, or was bumped, or stopped a stray. Nothing down here, so he didn't bump himself, unless he threw it out the window after he used it." He gave the flash to the back of the seat, making a big moon with rings around it that wobbled up and down.

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"No, he didn't stop a stray either. There's a bullet-hole on the seat-cushion that missed him, there's another, there's another —"

"Using my cab for a shooting-gallery!" I wailed. "Gotta have the whole thing done over now and it comes out of my —"

He got down out of the doorway finally. "Take him inside, fellas." And to me: "Well, you came to the right place with him. It's a murder case." He gave my license a flick of the torch, read the name. "Get inside, O'Dare. We're going to have chit-chat together, lots of it."

I went in mumbling, "Business isn't slow enough, I gotta go into dry-dock half a night."

"Aw, you oughta be home darning somebody's socks, anyway," he growled.

I stopped short and glowered and he didn't have starch enough to face me. Then I went ahead in.

I was called into the back room after they'd got through searching and examining the dead fare. The proprieties, I guess. He was hidden under a sheet now, on an improvised bier made of two chairs pushed together.

"Sit down, O'Dare," Kelsey said coldly. The atmosphere had turned a little hostile, and I wondered why.

"Come across." He was holding out his hand to me palm-up like he expected me to put something in it.

"Come across with what?"

"With his dough and wallet and other belongings. You rolled him before you brought him here. He's clean as a kosher chicken. Mean to say a well-dressed guy like him hails a cab for a three-buck ride without a nickel in his pocket to pay for it?"

I don't bulldoze easy. I left my chair so fast it keeled over behind me. "Say lissen, don't be making noises like a detective around me!" I yelped. "No big cop can say that to me and get away with it!"

The lieutenant and one of the cops had to hold me back. "Call a matron in here and have me searched!" I demanded. "I got a message for you guys in both these hands!"

All of a sudden I quit trying to get at Kelsey, shut up and blinked twice, which with me is a sign of cogitation.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Did I tell you about that girl?"

"You didn't tell us anything yet," scowled the lieutenant.

"A girl tried to climb in with him just as we were passing a place called 'Butch's Idle Hour.' I had to haul her out by main force. That's where his dough and wallet went. Either that or she killed him." I told them how she'd lit out and kept looking back the whole way. "But I didn't hear any gun-shot," I had to admit, "and I was right outside the cab myself."

"What was she like?"

"A red-headed number with three faces — her own, a layer of dirt, then a layer of paint over that. She had on an orange dress, and about twenty dead alley-cats sewn together over that."

The lieutenant said, "Costello, go

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over and case this 'Butch's Idle Hour' hangout and the neighborhood around it. See if such a woman was seen around there tonight. It better be the truth," he added to me, "or I'm gonna have a couple of policewomen give you a massage with a hose."

"Yeah?" I flared. "Let 'em try it, you won't know them from the hose by the time I get through with 'em!"

Kelsey sighed, "What makes you so feminine and helpless?"

The lieutenant said, "Now you're going over that whole ride with a fine-comb for us. Didn't he call out, say anything to you at any time? You're at the wheel of a small two-by-four cab and a guy gets six bullets shot at him right in back of you, and you didn't tumble? Why, even if a silencer was used you should have heard the bark. This don't make it look so hot for you, you know."

"All right, I did it!" I blazed up. "That's why I brought him around here first thing! I never saw the guy before, and if I'm going to go after loot the crooked way, why should I bother sitting up half the night inhaling monoxide?"

I had them there, I guess. They didn't dwell on that angle of it any more after that. "All right, you're just deaf, dumb and blind," I was told. "Shoot."

"I picked him up outside the uptown Athletic Club, you know the one. He asked for Pier 10, so I started to give it to him. I took Madison down to the Square, then went over on 23rd to Eighth."

"Why didn't you take the West Side Express Highway, if you were making a North River pier?"

"Too short a way of getting there," I said bluntly. "I'm not a thought-wave, I'm a taxi-driver."

"Then?"

"First few blocks he was too talkative. Then he asked for the Agony Box so I tuned in. Krindler's broadcast. He got burned up about something in it, and didn't say anything from then on. Something about a guy got cleaned at a floating gambling-game and was going to squawk; I was too busy driving to listen very close. He said he knew the guy, and that broadcast was putting the guy on the spot."

They all sat up straighter. The lieutenant said, "There's something right there. It may tie up with this. Kelsey, phone Krindler's secretary and find out just whom he meant, and where he got his info. Tell her it's a police department request. And Kelsey, no information from us."

Kelsey went out and Costello, the other dick, passed him coming in. He'd made it in smart time. "She's right," he said, "there's a dame been working late-bound single-fare cabs that way, around there lately. Taxi-cab Trixie. Plays drunk, gets up on the running-board, and works a dip act right through the window. I cased her room and I found this."

He threw down a wallet with a gold clip on each corner. The lieutenant pounced on it, went through it like a vacuum cleaner. "Fred Sheridan," I

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heard him say. That must have been the guy's name that had been over there on the two chairs. They'd taken him out by now to give him an autopsy.

"Swell," he said. "Now go back and get hold of Taxicab Trixie. Bring her in."

"She is in," said Costello happily. "I forgot to tell you, I rode a cab over there to save time, we slowed for a light, and she tried it on *me*, so I followed her back to her room. That's how I found out where she roosts."

A figure in orange and dirty-rabbit was shoved into the room. "Cop-lover," she snarled at me.

The lieutenant said, "Now listen, Butter Fingers, give us straight answers on this and it'll save you plenty grief."

"I didn't do nothin'," she croaked. She had a voice like the tail-end of a bath going down the drain-pipe. "I only ast the guy to gimme a ride and — and his wallet got caught on my oimine cape when I leaned over him. I found it hanging there when I got home."

"We'll come to this perambulating wallet later in the evening, in Night Court," the cop assured her. "What I want to know now is, was he already shot or wasn't he, when you frisked him? Now gimme the McCoy on that or you'll wish you was never born."

She looked around at them frightenedly. "I didn't do *that*," she said frantically. "I saw something was the matter with him, that's why I powdered like I done."

"Then he already had a bullet in him?"

She nodded. "My knuckles came away all slippery when they brushed against his shirt." Then suddenly, as though driven to the truth as a last resort, "He guv it to me. I didn't take it, he *guv* it to me! When he looked down and saw me easing it out, know what he done? He winked his eye at me and he said under his breath, 'Take it, kid, it's no good to me now any more.'"

I had a feeling this part of it was on the level, I don't know why. I remembered that lopsided grin of his, in my mirror, for several blocks after that. It seemed to sort of fit in with his saying a thing like that to her.

The lieutenant didn't seem to think this dying bequest altered the facts any. "Yeah, so he *guv* it to you. And so are we gonna *guv* you something. This is your lucky night. Take her out and book her, Costello."

When the twenty-four dead "oimine" cats had gone, the cop went on: "That narrows it down a bit. That places it somewhere along the long straight ride down Madison, or the short cross-town pull over on 23rd. The rest of the way after that he was just dying."

"But why didn't he tap on the glass, do something?" I wailed, "I coulda gotten him to a hospital a million times!"

"Maybe he was in a mood for dying," the lieutenant said. "Sore at the world. First fleeced out of his money, then shot down like a dog. Went out

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bitter. Some of them do. Then again maybe he knew talking would bring on his finish all the quicker. Internal hemorrhage or something. That ain't our business. Our business is who sent those bullets at him. Go back over the first two legs of that ride, go back over every light you stopped for, every sound you heard above your own engine."

I said, "A punch-drunk car swerved in and out across the right of way, nearly piled me up on the sidewalk. That was right about opposite the Metropolitan Life Ins —"

He glowered at me. "What were you trying to do, save that for a rainy day? That must have been it right there!"

"But they didn't pass me from behind, they were coming toward me," I expostulated. "How could they know ahead of time who was gonna be in my cab?"

He didn't let that stump him. "They might have seen him getting in and followed you, gotten ahead of you by going down one of the other parallel avenues, Fourth or Lexington, then doubled around to meet you. Tricky timing, but it could have been done. The important thing is, was there any noise when they grazed you?"

"Was there! They mustn't have cleaned out their exhaust since last Fourth of July. You couldn't hear yourself think the way they backfired."

"Backfired!" he sneered.

"I been in this racket long enough to know backfiring when I hear it. You could see the black smoke from the waste all over the street."

"Never mind that; give us a load of this car. Did you catch the number or see how many were in it?"

"I didn't see nothing about it. I was lucky I didn't see stars!"

"You still are, right now!" he said wrathfully. "The way my mitts are itching to shake some memory into you!"

Kelsey came in, said, "I got Krindler himself, he musta thought he'd get some hot tips. He told me he meant this guy Sheridan himself got cleaned, that's who. He got it out of thin air, he claims; just one of those disembodied rumors that travel from mouth to mouth up and down the Fifties."

"Well, did he know anything about who's behind this gambling outfit?"

"He said he didn't, even if he did — he wants to live a little longer."

"Well, this rumor managed to kill Sheridan! The gamblers musta already warned Sheridan to shut up. Or maybe they didn't bother. But when this groundless rumor got back to them, that did the trick. Sheridan was really heading for a pier to lam out of the way when he got into that cab, and they thought he was heading in a devious course for cops. That's poetic. But I'm not poetic. I want the guys in that car that Bright Eyes here didn't see nothing of but black smoke. Now come on, shake it up, I want some action. Go up there and case Sheridan's quarters at the Athletic Club."

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When he got all through peppering orders around, I spoke up: "How about my three bucks? You gotcha work cut out for you, but where do I come in? I gotta cab out there fulla buckshot and blood."

The lieutenant wasn't amenable. "Shut up!" he roared. "Before I pour gasoline all over you and put a match to you!"

"Do you want her held for a material witness, Lieutenant?" somebody asked helpfully.

Just as I was getting ready to let out an agonized howl, he said disgustedly, "What kind of a material witness would she make? She didn't see nothing, didn't hear nothing, don't know nothing! Get her out of my sight. See that she reports back here tomorrow for further questioning."

I used their phone and explained the mess I was in to the cab offices, and that didn't do my record any good. The cops wouldn't let me take my cab away, impounded it or whatever they call it, so their ballistic experts could gouge the bullets out and go over the markings, and it was too late by then to take another out. So I started out to ride home on the El. Imagine me — riding the El!

Kelsey came down the station steps after me, said his assignment was taking him my way. "It would," I growled, "I never had any luck."

"Smoke?" he said, by way of burying the hatchet.

"I roll my own," I said scornfully. And I got out the makings.

"Remind me to borrow your razor sometime," he said wearily.

"If it's to cut your throat, it's yours for the asking any time at all."

So we parted the best of friends, kind of not.

Well, I reported down there again the next day, like I'd been ordered to, and got my cab back — with four nice big gouged-out shell-craters in the upholstery. "Did they have to take half the stuffing out just to get at them bullets?" I wailed. "I coulda done it with a bent hairpin!"

"I didn't know you used 'em," Kelsey remarked.

"I don't, but I coulda done it with one anyway! Am I going to be soaked for repairs!"

Costello and Kelsey drove with me in my cab to try and identify a black touring car that had been found abandoned at daylight way up at Exterior Street, on the Bronx side of the Harlem, near the produce market. It had been stolen only twenty-four hours before, they told me, and the plates were queer, of course. But since I hadn't got a look at them in the first place, that didn't make any difference.

I walked all around it like a prospective buyer, stood back from it, went up close to it, couldn't make up my mind.

"Well, you've got one girlish trait anyway," Kelsey purred.

"Shut up, Big Mouth. I can't tell from the ground like this. The color and chassis click perfectly, but that don't mean anything, I was seeing it

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through layers of soot. Tell you what you do: Suppose one of you takes the wheel and comes at me like they did last night. That ought to gimme the picture."

They howled. Kelsey leaned way back, opened his mouth like the Holland Tunnel, and slapped his sides. "Is that a honey?" he bawled. "She can't tell what it's like standing still, it's gotta be whizzing by her!"

I looked around for a chunk of brick to let fly at him, so he finally controlled himself enough to get in, back up a ways, and then come to me. I was back in my own machine. "Don't hit me, now!" I warned.

He no sooner got under way than the thing started to bang like a firecracker, send out stuff thicker and blacker than coal dust. He skimmed by me, braked in the rear. I got down and went over to him menacingly. "Laugh now, will you, you big gorilla! That did it! This is the baby, all right! Did you see that filthy exhaust?"

"Yeah," he said, "but there could be two cars with —"

"That ain't all," I interrupted. "The shade-roller over the back window was crooked last night, hung down triangular, longer on one side than the other. And so is this one, but it only registered on me when I turned my head and looked after you just now. Are there gonna be two cars with dirty exhausts and lopsided rear-shades both?"

He didn't laugh any more.

Going back I asked, "All right, it's the same car. But what good does knowing that do you?"

"Plenty," he said. "Didn't you ever hear of fingerprints and things like that? Didn't you see me grab that wheel over a handkerchief?"

"Oh, is that why you did it? I thought your hands were leaky."

Before I left them to go back on the job, he took me aside, sort of hesitated, cleared his throat, finally showed me a paper. "Fred Sheridan, well-known sportsman, mysteriously shot; woman cab-driver only link."

"Them headquarters reporters," he said disgustedly. "I told 'em to leave you out of it. But no, they hadda have their human-interest angle."

"I don't get what you're beefing about. You knew it and I knew it. Was it supposed to be a secret?"

"You're the only licensed woman cabbie inside the city limits," he told me. "Don't you get this: 'Only link.' They may go after you next. Easy enough for them to track you down."

"Bull-oney!" I scoffed. "I have no regular stand, the men drivers resent me, so the company lets me freelance. I'm here, there, everywhere. How they gonna catch up with me?"

He said, "How'd they catch up with Sheridan?"

"How can I put the finger on the killers? I didn't see them myself."

"How do they know that? I think you better stay off the streets a while, at least give up night-cruising. I was wondering if you wouldn't want me to detail one of our guys to ride around with you?"

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"That's all I need to frighten away customers, one of your square-heads!" I said somewhat ungratefully. "I can look out for myself."

He got sore and stalked off, growling, "I feel sorry for —"

"I'll do my own feeling sorry."

"For *them*, not you!" he finished up. "I feel sorry for anyone that tries to take you over! A tigress with hydrophobia is a house-pet compared to you!"

Then I took my old machine to the repair shop. It sure needed it the way the guts were coming out of the back cushions. I took out a new cab, brought it around to my place, and parked it at the door while I went up and poured water through yesterday's coffee grounds. Most men cabbies pick up their snacks at the nearest lunch counter, but I stayed out of those places as much as I could on account of the razzing I always got from the rest of them.

My horn started going. Not short toots but one long uninterrupted blast. I knew what that meant right away. Those kids again; they'd stuck a pin in the control button. Yelling out the window at them was just waving a red rag at a bull, so I grabbed up a hair-brush and breathing dire vengeance, crept down the creaky stairs.

They broke and scattered every which way when I came dashing out of the tenement doorway, but luck was with me today. One of them, the one I wanted most, that pestiferous Rooney kid, in some way got caught by the back of his pants on the door-handle. His pants got pulled halfway down him, and all I had to do was take over.

I parked my leg on the step, pushed his head down over it, and went to work with the hair-brush there and then. "I been waiting for this for months!" I puffed. "You will ride my fenders and my roof! You will stick pins in my horn!"

His mother looked out the window, started bellowing down imprecations. She was too fat to come down to the rescue in person, but she threw a nasty flower pot, with a geranium left in it, so I let him go, got under the wheel, and drove off.

The last thing I heard were her stentorian admonitions to him to: "Climb on it all ye want, Timothy!" She'd show me, even if it meant her kid's life; that sort of thing. But he'd vanished like a puff of smoke.

After that, it was back to the usual grind for me: Two old maids who had to make Grand Central in a hurry and piled so much baggage around me I could hardly see the street ahead of me. Then gave me a nickel tip. My luck was two-and-half-cent pieces aren't minted. Then the other extreme. A guy who'd just had a row with his sweetie and had me drive him around and around in the park to the tune of six bucks; then he phoned her from the Plaza and she told him all was forgiven, so he came out and handed me a dollar tip. I made tracks away from there before he could change his mind.

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Some guy was standing on a corner two blocks east of there, looking for a lift. Me and another driver coming the opposite way, both spotted him at once, charged in at him. But he was on my side of the light, the other driver got stalled by it, and I got him.

He gave me an address, got in without looking at me. I didn't say anything, so he didn't tumble he had a lady steering him. This often happened, as I've already said. There wasn't the usual match-flare to play up my license. The flare came later, when we were nearly there, but it was just to light a cigarette. At first! But it stayed on, he didn't whip it right out, so then I knew he'd finally spotted the license. In my mirror, I saw him squinting at it. Then the match went out, and I waited for the usual barrage of questions. None came. Not a peep out of him.

We were passing a drugstore and he knuckled the glass. "Stop here a minute, driver, I just remembered a call I've got to make."

He wasn't gone long, came back and got in, again without looking at me. He changed his destination, though. "Take me down to the corner of 14th Street and Second Avenue instead," he said quietly. "I've got an appointment there."

"Which corner?" I asked later, as we glided under the 3rd Avenue El.

"Northwest," he said.

As we coasted up, I got ready to choke off my meter, thinking he was leaving me there. "Leave it on," he said tonelessly, "you're not through yet."

There were two men suddenly, and one got in on one side, one on the other. Where they'd come from I don't know, I hadn't seen them a second before.

We stood there a minute, while I waited for further instructions. I didn't hear a sound back of me, not a word of greeting. Finally I turned my head around inquiringly. All three of them were looking at me. I could make out the pale ovals of their faces in the gloom.

Finally one of them murmured almost inaudibly to the other two, "Where'll it be?"

I didn't catch the answer until the suggestion was relayed to me in a louder voice. "Take us down to Corlear's Hook."

That's down on the lower East Side, on the waterfront. I couldn't help remembering last night, and poor Sheridan; he'd been heading for the waterfront on the lower West Side. Odd coincidence, that was all. I couldn't remember just what boats left from East River piers, but that was none of my business.

South Street, with its ghosts and shadows of the old days when New York was young, was deserted. We got to Corlear's Hook, and a voice behind me said, "Over to the pier, on the other side." Then when I'd made a U-turn; "Drive right in."

The empty pier yawned black and empty under the shed; not a soul in sight, not a light the whole length of

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it. There was no boat leaving from here, it hadn't been used in years.

One name came to my mind: "Kelsey!" I understood — too late. As my foot started down toward the accelerator, a cold round tube bored into the back of my neck.

"Straight in, girlie," a voice said with suave ferocity.

"Got rope?" a second one asked.

"Yeah, coiled around me under my coat."

I said as quietly as I could, "What are you doing this to me for? I've only got eight bucks in the kitty."

"Oh, we wouldn't touch your eight bucks for the world," I was assured mockingly. "You can take it with you."

I thought, "No, I'm damned! Let them shoot me through the brains then; I'm not driving into that black tunnel ahead."

But the choice was taken away from me. One of them slipped around onto the seat next to me without touching the ground at all and took over the wheel. The cold steel tube left my neck, reversed, and it felt like the whole pier shed had fallen down on my head. I groaned and slumped, went sort of limp but didn't lose consciousness. They were used to hitting men; I had a flock of hair piled on top of my dome.

The pier seemed to slip by like in a dream. Pitch-black, but I could feel motion under me. Then a star or two showed up, and we were out at the other end, the water end.

I was in the back seat now and they were lacing rope around me endlessly, never seemed to get through. I thought of screaming, but a handkerchief or something was in my mouth.

"Any weight?" a voice asked.

"Naw, the cab'll be weight enough. Close that skylight in the roof."

Two of them got down, and the two doors slammed, one on each side of me. The engine was still turning over, and now I could feel motion set in again. I could hear the shift from low to second. I could hear a voice outside say, "Watch yourself now, Augie!"

"You'd think I never done this before," was the jocular answer. That came from the driver's seat in front of me. Then it was empty and the cab pitched a trifle as someone leaped off it.

Just as the sickening forward lurch began that told me the front wheels were already over the edge and dropping, I thought I heard a siren keen somewhere near at hand. But I figured it was the whine of the water rushing up around me, closing over me.

What if it was a police car? No power on earth could keep this cab up on the pier now, halt its drop into the river. My stomach came up and hit the top of my head. The next instant all was coldness, wetness and a roaring sound. A roaring sound that stopped as my ears filled.

All there was of me was threshing panic, spinning my body madly around in a water-filled tank that had once been the square interior of my cab. It wasn't deep and the second impact came almost at once. Panic

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was madness now, and madness was strangulation.

A shard of detached glass brushed lightly by my face as it settled downward toward the cab floor. The windows had just broken — or been broken. Then something heavier than glass, something moving of its own accord, not water-motion stabbed in at me. An arm, a sleeved arm, groping. It struck me twice, then went away again. In an instant, lightning-quick, it came back again, and another arm with it. One grabbed my upward-floating seaweed hair, the other the cloth on my shoulder. I flung my roped body toward the way it was pulling. A huge rolling-pin seemed to scrape roughly all the way down my back, then dropped off below me. Maybe the top of the cab doorframe.

Then I was shooting upward into the silver beams of powerful lights, and there was another body beside me, clutching at me, seeming to lift me.

The silver light suddenly broke into air, but the breath I took hurt more than all the water had. Then blackness, as though I'd gone down again. Not water-blackness this time, blackness of sleep.

The respirator-tube was being pulled out of my mouth, and I was in a white interior. Like another cab, only it was going lickety-split and a bell was clanging deafeningly outside it.

"She don't need any more of that stuff, she'll be all right," a man in white said.

There was another man there wrapped in a blanket, with his hair all stringy. He was drinking whiskey from a bottle. Kelsey!

"Hello, dick," I said.

"Hello, cabbie," he said.

"How'd you get like that?"

"Getting you out."

"How'd you know where I was?"

"A little kid named Rooney was riding your fenders all night. He recognized those guys when they got in with you, remembered them from last night. He jumped off and phoned in to us from near the pier. He's going to come in handy to us at the trial, I mean the Sheridan trial."

"The —— killers?" I asked.

"Yeah, the killers. A set of crooked gamblers who had cleaned Sheridan. We got 'em all right. They tried to run when they heard our siren, but there wasn't any place to run except into the water. Our spot and headlights blinded 'em and we mowed one down. The others think they're turning State's evidence against each other — which is a laugh — and admit they were afraid Sheridan would welch to the cops, so they simply gunned him out. They thought you might've spotted 'em in the death car. So-o. . . . That Rooney kid sure saved you from a mermaid's playground."

"Gee, I'd like to have a kid like him," I said.

He took another swig of whiskey. "I know a swell way," he mumbled.

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JAMES HILTON SELECTS . . .

Which are the twelve best detective short stories ever written? . . . You will recall that we asked a special panel of experts, consisting of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and your Editors (serving as twelfth talesmen), to select the finest detective-crime short stories written in 109 years of ratiocinative romance — the crème de la *crime, the best of all time. Among 83 tales nominated, twelve gathered the garlands of glory. Here is* THE GOLDEN DOZEN:

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole	by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter	by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League	by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance	by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie	by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13	by Jacques Futrelle
The Oracle of the Dog	by G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard	by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile	by Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs	by H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard	by E. C. Bentley
Suspicion	by Dorothy L. Sayers

This month we bring you Aldous Huxley's "The Gioconda Smile," sponsored by James Hilton. As in the case of previous sponsors, James Hilton needs no introduction to readers of EQMM. The author of two contemporary classics, LOST HORIZON *and* GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS *— both enormously successful as books and movies — Mr. Hilton has produced excellent detective short stories, all of which have been reprinted in EQMM.*

Here are some interesting facts about Mr. Hilton's literary career. He wrote his first novel at the age of seventeen (think of it!) and it was published while James Hilton was still in college. He wrote GOODBYE, MR. CHIPS *in four days — to meet a Christmas deadline. (According to Mrs. Stevenson herself, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote each of the two versions of* STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR HYDE *in three days of feverish and frenzied activity, but whether Stevenson was meeting any deadline other than that of hunger is a detail unknown to us.)*

But to get back to Mr. Hilton: he is the author of one detective novel written under the pen-name of Glen Trevor. It was called MURDER AT SCHOOL *in England, and* WAS IT MURDER? *in America. Vincent Starrett*

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praised the book as "unusual, very well written . . . a first-rate story." In recent years Mr. Hilton has dabbled in radio — as host-narrator on the "Hallmark Playhouse" — and more and more often one comes upon jeweled little criticisms of modern books under the by-line of James Hilton.

With one exception, all the stories in Mr. Hilton's list of personal favorites are by English authors. "This is probably due to the fact," Mr. Hilton commented, "that I read much more crime and detective fiction when I was living in England." The lone exception — and it is a source of special satisfaction to us to call your attention to it — is a story which won a second prize in EQMM's 1945 Contest. Mr. Hilton's "choice of a dozen good detective short stories" include:

The Gioconda Smile	by Aldous Huxley
The Speckled Band	by A. Conan Doyle
The Engineer's Thumb	by A. Conan Doyle
The Absence of Mr. Glass	by G. K. Chesterton
The Horror of Studley Grange	by Meade & Halifax
The Unpunishable Crime	by John Brophy
The Motive	by Ronald Knox
The Stolen Ingots	by R. Austin Freeman
The Case of the White Footprints	by R. Austin Freeman
The Man on Ben Na Grave	by H. H. Bashford
The Man Who Sang in Church	by Edgar Wallace
An Error in Chemistry	by William Faulkner

In 1938 Chatto and Windus of London published the first separate edition of THE GIOCONDA SMILE, *as No. 9 in their series of Zodiac Books. The earlier eight titles in the series were books by William Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell, John Donne, John Keats, William Cobbett, Addison & Steele, William Blake, and Edward Lear. As Marcus Aurelius meditated, "Things that have a common quality ever quickly seek their kind."*

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

by ALDOUS HUXLEY

MISS SPENCE will be down directly, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hutton, without turning round. Janet Spence's parlormaid was so ugly — ugly on purpose, it always seemed to him, malignantly, criminally ugly — that he could not bear to look at her more

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than was necessary. The door closed. Left to himself, Mr. Hutton got up and began to wander round the room, looking with meditative eyes at the familiar objects it contained.

Photographs of Greek statuary, photographs of the Roman Forum, colored prints of Italian masterpieces, all very safe and well known. Poor, dear Janet, what a prig — what an intellectual snob! Her real taste was illustrated in that water-color by the pavement artist, the one she had paid half a crown for (and thirty-five shillings for the frame). How often he had heard her tell the story, how often expatiate on the beauties of that skillful imitation of an oleograph! "A real Artist in the streets," and you could hear the capital A in Artist as she spoke the words. She made you feel that part of his glory had entered into Janet Spence when she tendered him that half-crown for the copy of the oleograph. She was implying a compliment to her own taste and penetration. A genuine Old Master for half a crown. Poor, dear Janet!

Mr. Hutton came to a pause in front of a small oblong mirror. Stooping a little to get a full view of his face, he passed a white, well-manicured finger over his mustache. It was as curly, as freshly auburn, as it had been twenty years ago. His hair still retained its color, and there was no sign of baldness yet — only a certain elevation of the brow. "Shakespearean," thought Mr. Hutton, with a smile, as he surveyed the smooth and polished expanse of his forehead.

Others abide our question, thou art free. . . . Footsteps in the sea . . . Majesty. . . . Shakespeare, thou shouldst be living at this hour. No, that was Milton, wasn't it? Milton, the Lady of Christ's. There was no lady about him. He was what the women would call a manly man. That was why they liked him — for the curly auburn mustache and the discreet redolence of tobacco. Mr. Hutton smiled again; he enjoyed making fun of himself. Lady of Christ's? No, no. He was the Christ of Ladies. Very pretty, very pretty. The Christ of Ladies. Mr. Hutton wished there were somebody he could tell the joke to. Poor, dear Janet wouldn't appreciate it, alas!

He straightened himself up, patted his hair, and resumed his peregrination. Damn the Roman Forum; he hated those dreary photographs.

Suddenly he became aware that Janet Spence was in the room, standing near the door. Mr. Hutton started, as though he had been taken in some felonious act. To make these silent and spectral appearances was one of Janet Spence's peculiar talents. Perhaps she had been there all the time, and seen him looking at himself in the mirror. Impossible! But, still, it was disquieting.

"Oh, you gave me such a surprise," said Mr. Hutton, recovering his smile and advancing with outstretched hand to meet her.

Miss Spence was smiling too: her Gioconda smile, he had once called it in a moment of half-ironical flattery.

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Miss Spence had taken the compliment seriously, and always tried to live up to the Leonardo standard. She smiled on in silence while Mr. Hutton shook hands; that was part of the Gioconda business.

"I hope you're well," said Mr. Hutton. "You look it."

What a queer face she had! That small mouth pursed forward by the Gioconda expression into a little snout with a round hole in the middle as though for whistling — it was like a penholder seen from the front. Above the mouth a well-shaped nose, finely aquiline. Eyes large, lustrous, and dark, with the largeness, lustre, and darkness that seems to invite sties and an occasional bloodshot suffusion. They were fine eyes, but unchangingly grave. The penholder might do its Gioconda trick, but the eyes never altered in their earnestness. Above them, a pair of boldly arched, heavily penciled black eyebrows lent a surprising air of power, as of a Roman matron, to the upper portion of the face. Her hair was dark and equally Roman; Agrippina from the brows upward.

"I thought I'd just look in on my way home," Mr. Hutton went on. "Ah, it's good to be back here" — he indicated with a wave of his hand the flowers in the vases, the sunshine and greenery beyond the windows — "it's good to be back in the country after a stuffy day of business in town."

Miss Spence, who had sat down, pointed to a chair at her side.

"No, really, I can't sit down," Mr. Hutton protested. "I must get back to see how poor Emily is. She was rather seedy this morning." He sat down, nevertheless. "It's these wretched liver chills. She's always getting them. Women ——" He broke off and coughed, so as to hide the fact that he had uttered. He was about to say that women with weak digestions ought not to marry; but the remark was too cruel, and he didn't really believe it. Janet Spence, moreover, was a believer in eternal flames and spiritual attachments. "She hopes to be well enough," he added, "to see you at luncheon tomorrow. Can you come? Do!" He smiled persuasively. "It's my invitation too, you know."

She dropped her eyes, and Mr. Hutton almost thought that he detected a certain reddening of the cheek. It was a tribute; he stroked his mustache.

"I should like to come if you think Emily's well enough to have a visitor."

"Of course. You'll do her good. You'll do us both good. In married life three is often better company than two."

"Oh, you're cynical."

Mr. Hutton always had a desire to say "Bow-wow-wow" whenever that last word was spoken. It irritated him more than any other word in the language. But instead of barking he made haste to protest.

"No, no. I'm only speaking a melancholy truth. Reality doesn't always come up to the ideal, you know. But that doesn't make me believe any the less in the ideal. Indeed, I believe in it

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passionately — the ideal of a matrimony between two people in perfect accord. I think it's realizable."

He paused significantly and looked at her with an arch expression. A virgin of thirty-six, but still unwithered; she had her charms. And there was something really rather enigmatic about her. Miss Spence made no reply, but continued to smile. There were times when Mr. Hutton got rather bored with the Gioconda. He stood up.

"I must really be going now. Farewell, mysterious Gioconda." The smile grew intenser, focused itself, as it were, in a narrower snout. Mr. Hutton made a Cinquecento gesture, and kissed her extended hand. It was the first time he had done such a thing; the action seemed not to be resented. "I look forward to tomorrow."

"Do you?"

For answer Mr. Hutton once more kissed her hand, then turned to go. Miss Spence accompanied him to the porch.

"Where's your car?" she asked.

"I left it at the gate of the drive."

"I'll come and see you off."

"No, no." Mr. Hutton was playful, but determined. "You must do no such thing. I simply forbid you."

"But I should like to come," Miss Spence protested, throwing a rapid Gioconda at him.

Mr. Hutton held up his hand. "No," he repeated, and then, with a gesture that was almost the blowing of a kiss, he started to run down the drive, lightly, on his toes, with long, bounding strides like a boy's. He was proud of that run; it was quite marvelously youthful. Still, he was glad the drive was no longer. At the last bend, before passing out of sight of the house, he halted and turned round. Miss Spence was still standing on the steps, smiling her smile. He waved his hand, and this time quite definitely and overtly wafted a kiss in her direction. Then, breaking once more into his magnificent canter, he rounded the last dark promontory of trees. Once out of sight of the house he let his high paces decline to a trot, and finally to a walk. He took out his handkerchief and began wiping his neck inside his collar. What fools, what fools! Has there ever been such an ass as poor, dear Janet Spence? Never, unless it was himself. Decidedly he was the more malignant fool, since he, at least, was aware of his folly and still persisted in it. Why did he persist? Ah, the problem that was himself, the problem that was other people . . .

He had reached the gate. A large, prosperous-looking motor was standing at the side of the road.

"Home, M'Nab." The chauffeur touched his cap. "And stop at the crossroads on the way, as usual," Mr. Hutton added, as he opened the door of the car. "Well?" he said, speaking into the obscurity that lurked within.

"Oh, Teddy Bear, what an age you've been!" It was a fresh and childish voice that spoke the words. There was the faintest hint of Cockney im-

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purity about all the vowel sounds.

Mr. Hutton bent his large form and darted into the car with the agility of an animal regaining his burrow.

"Have I?" he said, as he shut the door. The machine began to move. "You must have missed me a lot if you found the time so long." He sat back in the low seat; a cherishing warmth enveloped him.

"Teddy Bear . . ." and with a sigh of contentment a charming little head declined onto Mr. Hutton's shoulder. Ravished, he looked down sideways at the round, babyish face.

"Do you know, Doris, you look like the pictures of Louise de Kerouaille." He passed his fingers through a mass of curly hair.

"Who's Louise de Kera-whatever-it-is?" Doris spoke from remote distances.

"She was, alas! *Fuit.* We shall all be 'was' one of these days. Meanwhile . . ."

Mr. Hutton covered the babyish face with kisses. The car rushed smoothly along. M'Nab's back, through the front window, was stonily impassive, the back of a statue.

"Your hands," Doris whispered. "Oh, you mustn't touch me. They give me electric shocks."

Mr. Hutton adored her for the virgin imbecility of the words. How late in one's existence one makes the discovery of one's body!

"The electricity isn't in me, it's in you." He kissed her again, whispering her name several times: Doris, Doris, Doris. The scientific appellation of the sea-mouse, he was thinking as he kissed the throat she offered him, white and extended like the throat of a victim awaiting the sacrificial knife. The sea-mouse was a sausage with iridescent fur: very peculiar. Or was Doris the sea-cucumber, which turns itself inside out in moments of alarm? He would really have to go to Naples again, just to see the aquarium. These sea creatures were fabulous.

"Oh, Teddy Bear!" (More zoology; but he was only a land animal. His poor little jokes!) "Teddy Bear, I'm so happy."

"So am I," said Mr. Hutton. Was it true?

"But I wish I knew if it were right. Tell me, Teddy Bear, is it right or wrong?"

"Ah, my dear, that's just what I've been wondering for the last thirty years."

"Be serious, Teddy Bear. I want to know if this is right; if it's right that I should be here with you and that we should love one another, and that it should give me electric shocks when you touch me."

"Right? Well, it's certainly good that you should have electric shocks rather than sexual repressions. Read Freud; repressions are the devil."

"Oh, you don't help me. Why aren't you ever serious? If only you knew how miserable I am sometimes, thinking it's not right. Perhaps, you know, there is a hell, and all that. I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think I ought to stop loving you."

"But could you?" asked Mr. Hut-

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ton, confident in the powers of his seduction and his mustache.

"No, Teddy Bear, you know I couldn't. But I could run away, I could hide from you. I could force myself not to come to you."

"Silly little thing!"

"Oh, dear. I hope it isn't wrong. And there are times when I don't care if it is."

Mr. Hutton was touched. He had a certain protective affection for this little creature. He laid his cheek against her hair and so, interlaced, they sat in silence, while the car, swaying and pitching a little as it hastened along, seemed to draw in the white road and the dusty hedges towards it.

"Goodbye, goodbye."

The car moved on, gathered speed, vanished round a curve, and Doris was left standing by the sign-post at the crossroads, still dizzy and weak with the languor born of those kisses and the electrical touch of those gentle hands. She had to take a deep breath, to draw herself up deliberately, before she was strong enough to start her homeward walk. She had half a mile in which to invent the necessary lies.

Alone, Mr. Hutton suddenly found himself the prey of an appalling boredom.

Mrs. Hutton was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, playing Patience. In spite of the warmth of the July evening a wood fire was burning on the hearth. A black Pomeranian, extenuated by the heat and the fatigues of digestion, slept before the small blaze.

"Phew! Isn't it rather hot in here?" Mr. Hutton asked as he entered.

"You know I have to keep warm, dear." The voice seemed breaking on the verge of tears. "I get so shivery."

"I hope you're better this evening."

"Not much, I'm afraid."

The conversation stagnated. Mr. Hutton stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He looked down at the Pomeranian lying at his feet, and with the toe of the right boot he rolled the little dog over and rubbed its white-flecked chest and belly. The creature lay in an inert ecstasy. Mrs. Hutton continued to play Patience. Arrived at an *impasse*, she altered the position of one card, took back another, and went on playing. Her Patiences always came out.

"Dr. Libbard thinks I ought to go to Llandrindod Wells this summer."

"Well, go, my dear."

Mr. Hutton was thinking of the events of the afternoon: how they had driven, Doris and he, up to the hanging wood, had left the car to wait for them under the shade of the trees, and walked together out into the windless sunshine of the chalk-down.

"I'm to drink the waters for my liver, and he thinks I ought to have massage and electric treatment, too."

Hat in hand, Doris had stalked four blue butterflies that were dancing together round a scabious flower with a motion that was like the flickering of blue fire. The blue fire burst and scattered into whirling sparks; she had given chase, laughing and shouting.

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"I'm sure it will do you good."

"I was wondering if you'd come with me, dear."

"But you know I'm going to Scotland at the end of the month."

Mrs. Hutton looked up at him entreatingly. "It's the journey," she said. "The thought of it is such a nightmare. I don't know if I can manage it. And you know I can't sleep in hotels. And then there's the luggage and all the worries. I can't go alone."

"But you won't be alone. You'll have your maid with you." He spoke impatiently. The sick woman was usurping the place of the healthy one. He was being dragged back from the memory of the sunlit down and the quick, laughing girl, back to this unhealthy, overheated room and its complaining occupant.

"I don't think I shall be able to go."

"But you must, my dear, if the doctor tells you to. And, besides, a change will do you good."

"I don't think so."

"But Libbard thinks so, and he knows what he's talking about."

"No, I can't face it. I'm too weak. I can't go alone." Mrs. Hutton pulled a handkerchief out of her black silk bag, and put it to her eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear, you must make the effort."

"I had rather be left in peace to die here." She was crying in earnest now.

"O Lord! Now do be reasonable. Listen now, please." Mrs. Hutton only sobbed more violently. "Oh, what is one to do?" He shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

Mr. Hutton was aware that he had not behaved with proper patience; but he could not help it. Very early in his manhood he had discovered that not only did he not feel sympathy for the poor, the weak, the diseased, and deformed; he actually hated them. Once, as an undergraduate, he spent three days at a mission in the East End. He had returned, filled with a profound and ineradicable disgust. Instead of pitying, he loathed the unfortunate. It was not, he knew, a very comely emotion, and he had been ashamed of it at first. In the end he had decided that it was temperamental, inevitable, and had felt no further qualms. Emily had been healthy and beautiful when he married her. He had loved her then. But now — was it his fault that she was like this?

Mr. Hutton dined alone. Food and drink left him more benevolent than he had been before dinner. To make amends for his show of exasperation he went up to his wife's room and offered to read to her. She was touched, gratefully accepted the offer, and Mr. Hutton, who was particularly proud of his accent, suggested a little light reading in French.

"French? I am so fond of French." Mrs. Hutton spoke of the language of Racine as though it were a dish of green peas.

Mr. Hutton ran down to the library and returned with a yellow volume. He began reading. The effort of pronouncing perfectly absorbed his whole attention. But how good his accent was! The fact of its goodness

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seemed to improve the quality of the novel he was reading.

At the end of fifteen pages an unmistakable sound aroused him. He looked up; Mrs. Hutton had gone to sleep. He sat still for a little while, looking with a dispassionate curiosity at the sleeping face. Once it had been beautiful; once, long ago, the sight of it, the recollection of it, had moved him with an emotion profounder, perhaps, than any he had felt before or since. Now it was lined and cadaverous. The skin was stretched tightly over the cheekbones, across the bridge of the sharp, bird-like nose. The closed eyes were set in profound bone-rimmed sockets. The lamplight striking on the face from the side emphasized with light and shade its cavities and projections. It was the face of a dead Christ by Morales.

Le squelette était invisible
Au temps hereux de l'art païen.

He shivered a little, and tiptoed out.

On the following day Mrs. Hutton came down to luncheon. She had had some unpleasant palpitations during the night, but she was feeling better now. Besides, she wanted to do honor to her guest. Miss Spence listened to her complaints about Llandrindod Wells, and was loud in sympathy, lavish with advice. Whatever she said was always said with intensity. She leaned forward, aimed, so to speak, like a gun, and fired her words. Bang! the charge in her soul was ignited, the words whizzed forth at the narrow barrel of her mouth. She was a machine-gun riddling her hostess with sympathy. Mr. Hutton had undergone similar bombardments, mostly of a literary or philosophic character — bombardments of Maeterlinck, of Mrs. Besant, of Bergson, of William James. Today the missiles were medical. She talked about insomnia, she expatiated on the virtues of harmless drugs and beneficent specialists. Under the bombardment Mrs. Hutton opened out, like a flower in the sun.

Mr. Hutton looked on in silence. The spectacle of Janet Spence evoked in him an unfailing curiosity. He was not romantic enough to imagine that every face masked an interior physiognomy of beauty or strangeness, that every woman's small talk was like a vapor hanging over mysterious gulfs. His wife, for example, and Doris; they were nothing more than what they seemed to be. But with Janet Spence it was somehow different. Here one could be sure that there was some kind of a queer face behind the Gioconda smile and the Roman eyebrows. The only question was: What exactly was there?

"But perhaps you won't have to go to Llandrindod after all," Miss Spence was saying. "If you get well quickly Dr. Libbard will let you off."

"I only hope so. Indeed, I do really feel rather better today."

Mr. Hutton felt ashamed. How much was it his own lack of sympathy that prevented her from feeling well every day? But he comforted himself by reflecting that it was only a case of feeling, not of being better. Sympathy does not mend a diseased liver.

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"My dear, I wouldn't eat those red currants if I were you," he said, suddenly solicitous. "You know that Libbard has banned everything with skins and pips."

"But I am so fond of them," Mrs. Hutton protested, "and I feel so well today."

"Don't be a tyrant," said Miss Spence, looking first at him and then at his wife. "Let the poor invalid have what she fancies; it will do her good." She laid her hand on Mrs. Hutton's arm and patted it affectionately.

"Thank you, my dear." Mrs. Hutton helped herself to the stewed currants.

"Well, don't blame me if they make you ill again."

"Do I ever blame you, dear?"

"You have nothing to blame me for," Mr. Hutton answered playfully. "I am the perfect husband."

They sat in the garden after luncheon. From the island of shade under the old cypress tree they looked out across a flat expanse of lawn, in which the parterres of flowers shone with a metallic brilliance.

Mr. Hutton took a deep breath of the warm and fragrant air. "It's good to be alive," he said.

"Just to be alive," his wife echoed, stretching one pale, knot-jointed hand into the sunlight.

A maid brought the coffee; the silver pots and the little blue cups were set on a folding table near the group of chairs.

"Oh, my medicine!" exclaimed Mrs. Hutton. "Run in and fetch it, Clara, will you? The white bottle on the sideboard."

"I'll go," said Mr. Hutton. "I've got to fetch a cigar in any case."

He ran in towards the house. On the threshold he turned round for an instant. The maid was walking back across the lawn. His wife was sitting up in her deck-chair, engaged in opening her white parasol. Miss Spence was bending over the table, pouring out the coffee. He passed into the cool obscurity of the house.

"Do you like sugar in your coffee?" Miss Spence inquired.

"Yes, please. Give me rather a lot. I'll drink it after my medicine to take the taste away."

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair, lowering the sunshade over her eyes, so as to shut out from her vision the burning sky.

Behind her, Miss Spence was making a delicate clinking among the coffee cups.

"I've given you three large spoonfuls. That ought to take the taste away. And here comes the medicine."

Mr. Hutton had reappeared, carrying a wine-glass, half-full of a pale liquid.

"It smells delicious," he said, as he handed it to his wife.

"That's only the flavoring." She drank it off at a gulp, shuddered, and made a grimace. "Ugh, it's so nasty. Give me my coffee."

Miss Spence gave her the cup; she sipped at it. "You've made it like syrup. But it's very nice, after that atrocious medicine."

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At half-past three Mrs. Hutton complained that she did not feel as well as she had done, and went indoors to lie down. Her husband would have said something about the red currants, but checked himself; the triumph of an "I told you so" was too cheaply won. Instead, he was sympathetic, and gave her his arm to the house.

"A rest will do you good," he said. "By the way, I shan't be back till after dinner."

"But why? Where are you going?"

"I promised to go to Johnson's this evening. We have to discuss the war memorial, you know."

"Oh, I wish you weren't going." Mrs. Hutton was almost in tears. "Can't you stay? I don't like being alone in the house."

"But, my dear, I promised — weeks ago." It was a bother having to lie like this. "And now I must get back and look after Miss Spence."

He kissed her on the forehead and went out again into the garden. Miss Spence received him aimed and intense.

"Your wife is dreadfully ill," she fired off at him.

"I thought she cheered up so much when you came."

"That was purely nervous, purely nervous. I was watching her closely. With a heart in that condition and her digestion wrecked — yes, wrecked — anything might happen."

"Libbard doesn't take so gloomy a view of poor Emily's health." Mr. Hutton held open the gate that led from the garden into the drive; Miss Spence's car was standing by the front door.

"Libbard is only a country doctor. You ought to see a specialist."

He could not refrain from laughing. "You have a macabre passion for specialists."

Miss Spence held up her hand in protest. "I am serious. I think poor Emily is in a very bad state. Anything might happen — at any moment."

He handed her into the car and shut the door. The chauffeur started the engine and climbed into his place.

"Shall I tell him to start?" He had no desire to continue the conversation.

Miss Spence leaned forward and shot a Gioconda in his direction. "Remember, I expect you to come and see me again soon."

Mechanically he grinned, made a polite noise, and, as the car moved forward, waved his hand. He was happy to be alone.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Hutton himself drove away. Doris was waiting at the crossroads. They dined together twenty miles from home, at a roadside hotel. It was one of those bad, expensive meals which are only cooked in country hotels frequented by motorists. It revolted Mr. Hutton, but Doris enjoyed it. She always enjoyed things. Mr. Hutton ordered a not very good brand of champagne. He was wishing he had spent the evening in his library.

When they started homewards Doris was a little tipsy and extremely

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affectionate. It was very dark inside the car, but looking forward, past the motionless form of M'Nab, they could see a bright and narrow universe of forms and colors scooped out of the night by the electric head-lamps.

It was after eleven when Mr. Hutton reached home. Dr. Libbard met him in the hall. He was a small man with delicate hands and well-formed features that were almost feminine. His brown eyes were large and melancholy. He used to waste a great deal of time sitting at the bedside of his patients, looking sadness through those eyes and talking in a sad, low voice about nothing in particular. His person exhaled a pleasing odor, decidedly antiseptic but at the same time suave and discreetly delicious.

"Libbard?" said Mr. Hutton in surprise. "You here? Is my wife ill?"

"We tried to fetch you earlier," the soft, melancholy voice replied. "It was thought you were at Mr. Johnson's, but they had no news of you there."

"No, I was detained. I had a breakdown," Mr. Hutton answered irritably. It was tiresome to be caught out in a lie.

"Your wife wanted to see you urgently."

"Well, I can go now." Mr. Hutton moved towards the stairs. Dr. Libbard laid a hand on his arm. "I am afraid it's too late."

"Too late?" He began fumbling with his watch; it wouldn't come out of the pocket.

"Mrs. Hutton passed away half an hour ago."

The voice remained even in its softness, the melancholy of the eyes did not deepen. Dr. Libbard spoke of death as he would speak of a local cricket match. All things were equally vain and equally deplorable.

Mr. Hutton found himself thinking of Janet Spence's words. At any moment — at any moment. She had been extraordinarily right.

"What happened?" he asked.

Dr. Libbard explained. It was heart failure brought on by a violent attack of nausea, caused in its turn by the eating of something of an irritant nature. Red currants? Mr. Hutton suggested. Very likely. It had been too much for the heart. There was chronic valvular disease: something had collapsed under the strain. It was all over; she could not have suffered much.

"It's a pity they should have chosen the day of the Eton and Harrow match for the funeral," old General Grego was saying as he stood, his top hat in his hand, under the shadow of the lych gate, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

Mr. Hutton overheard the remark and with difficulty restrained a desire to inflict grievous bodily pain on the General. He would have liked to hit the old brute in the middle of his big red face. Monstrous great mulberry, spotted with meal! Was there no respect for the dead? Did nobody care? In theory he didn't much care; let the dead bury their dead. But here, at the graveside, he had found himself ac-

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tually sobbing. Poor Emily, they had been pretty happy once. Now she was lying at the bottom of a seven-foot hole. And here was Grego complaining that he couldn't go to the Eton and Harrow match.

Mr. Hutton looked around at the groups of black figures that were drifting slowly out of the churchyard towards the fleet of cabs and motors assembled in the road outside. Against the brilliant background of the July grass and flowers and foliage, they had a horribly alien and unnatural appearance. It pleased him to think that these people would soon be dead too.

That evening Mr. Hutton sat up late in his library reading the life of Milton. There was no particular reason why he should have chosen Milton; it was the book that first came to hand, that was all. It was after midnight when he had finished. He got up from his armchair, unbolted the French windows, and stepped out on to the little paved terrace. The night was quiet and clear. Mr. Hutton looked at the stars and at the holes between them, dropped his eyes to the dim lawns and hueless flowers of the garden, and let them wander over the farther landscape, black and gray under the moon.

He began to think with a kind of confused violence. There were the stars, there was Milton. A man can be somehow the peer of stars and night. Greatness, nobility. But is there seriously a difference between the noble and the ignoble? Milton, the stars, death, and himself — himself. The soul, the body; the higher and the lower nature. Perhaps there was something in it, after all. Milton had a god on his side and righteousness. What had he? Nothing, nothing whatever. There were only Doris's little breasts. What was the point of it all? Milton, the stars, death, and Emily in her grave, Doris and himself — always himself . . .

Oh, he was a futile and disgusting being. Everything convinced him of it. It was a solemn moment. He spoke aloud: "I will, I will." The sound of his own voice in the darkness was appalling; it seemed to him that he had sworn that infernal oath which binds even the gods: "I will, I will." There had been New Year's days and solemn anniversaries in the past, when he had felt the same contritions and recorded similar resolutions. They had all thinned away, these resolutions, like smoke, into nothingness. But this was a greater moment and he had pronounced a more fearful oath. In the future it was to be different. Yes, he would live by reason, he would be industrious, he would curb his appetites, he would devote his life to some good purpose. It was resolved.

In practice he saw himself spending his mornings in agricultural pursuits, riding round with the bailiff, seeing that his land was farmed in the best modern way — silos and artificial manures and continuous cropping, and all that. The remainder of the day should be devoted to serious study. There was that book he had been intending to write for so long —

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The Effect of Diseases on Civilization.

Mr. Hutton went to bed humble and contrite, but with a sense that grace had entered into him. He slept for seven and a half hours, and woke to find the sun brilliantly shining. The emotions of the evening before had been transformed by a good night's rest into his customary cheerfulness. It was not until a good many seconds after his return to conscious life that he remembered his resolution, his Stygian oath. Milton and death seemed somehow different in the sunlight. As for the stars, they were not there. But the resolutions were good; even in the daytime he could see that. He had his horse saddled after breakfast, and rode round the farm with the bailiff. After luncheon he read Thucydides on the plague at Athens. In the evening he made a few notes on malaria in Southern Italy. While he was undressing he remembered that there was a good anecdote in Skelton's jest-book about the Sweating Sickness. He would have made a note of it if only he could have found a pencil.

On the sixth morning of his new life Mr. Hutton found among his correspondence an envelope addressed in that peculiarly vulgar handwriting which he knew to be Doris's. He opened it, and began to read. She didn't know what to say; words were so inadequate. His wife dying like that, and so suddenly — it was too terrible. Mr. Hutton sighed, but his interest revived somewhat as he read:

"Death is so frightening, I never think of it when I can help it. But when something like this happens, or when I am feeling ill or depressed, then I can't help remembering it is there so close, and I think about all the wicked things I have done and about you and me, and I wonder what will happen, and I am so frightened. I am so lonely, Teddy Bear, and so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I can't get rid of the idea of dying, I am so wretched and helpless without you. I didn't mean to write to you; I meant to wait till you were out of mourning and could come and see me again, but I am so lonely and miserable, Teddy Bear, I had to write. I couldn't help it. Forgive me, I want you so much; I have nobody in the world but you. You are so good and gentle and understanding; there is nobody like you. I shall never forget how good and kind you have been to me, and you are so clever and know so much, I can't understand how you ever came to pay any attention to me, I am so dull and stupid, much less like me and love me, because you do love me a little, don't you, Teddy Bear?"

Mr. Hutton was touched with shame and remorse. To be thanked like this, worshipped for having seduced the girl — it was too much. It had just been a piece of imbecile wantonness. Imbecile, idiotic: there was no other way to describe it. For, when all was said, he had derived very little pleasure from it. Taking all things together, he had probably been more bored than amused. Once upon a time he had believed himself to be a

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hedonist. But to be a hedonist implies a certain process of reasoning, a deliberate choice of known pleasures, a rejection of known pains. This had been done without reason, against it. For he knew beforehand — so well, so well — that there was no interest or pleasure to be derived from these wretched affairs. And yet each time the vague itch came upon him he succumbed, involving himself once more in the old stupidity. There had been Maggie, his wife's maid, and Edith, the girl on the farm, and Mrs. Pringle, and the waitress in London, and others — there seemed to be dozens of them. It had all been so stale and boring. He knew it would be; he always knew. And yet, and yet . . . Experience doesn't teach.

Poor little Doris! He would write to her kindly, comfortingly, but he wouldn't see her again. A servant came to tell him that his horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and rode off. That morning the old bailiff was more irritating than usual. . . .

Five days later Doris and Mr. Hutton were sitting together on the pier at Southend; Doris, in white muslin with pink garnishings, radiated happiness; Mr. Hutton, legs outstretched and chair tilted, had pushed the panama back from his forehead, and was trying to feel like a tripper. That night, when Doris was asleep, breathing and warm by his side, he recaptured, in this moment of darkness and physical fatigue, the rather cosmic emotion which had possessed him that evening, not a fortnight ago, when he had made his great resolution. And so his solemn oath had already gone the way of so many other resolutions. Unreason had triumphed; at the first itch of desire he had given way. He was hopeless, hopeless.

For a long time he lay with closed eyes, ruminating his humiliation. The girl stirred in her sleep. Mr. Hutton turned over and looked in her direction. Enough faint light crept in between the half-drawn curtains to show her bare arm and shoulder, her neck, and the dark tangle of hair on the pillow. She was beautiful, desirable. Why did he lie there moaning over his sins? What did it matter? If he were hopeless, then so be it; he would make the best of his hopelessness. A glorious sense of irresponsibility suddenly filled him. He was free, magnificently free. In a kind of exaltation he drew the girl towards him. She woke, bewildered, almost frightened under his rough kisses.

The storm of his desire subsided into a kind of serene merriment. The whole atmosphere seemed to be quivering with enormous silent laughter.

"Could anyone love you as much as I do, Teddy Bear?" The question came faintly from distant worlds of love.

"I think I know somebody who does," Mr. Hutton replied. The submarine laughter was swelling, rising, ready to break the surface of silence and resound.

"Who? Tell me. What do you mean?" The voice had come very close; charged with suspicion, an-

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guish, indignation, it belonged to this immediate world.

"A — ah!"

"Who?"

"You'll never guess." Mr. Hutton kept up the joke until it began to grow tedious, and then pronounced the name: "Janet Spence."

Doris was incredulous. "Miss Spence of the Manor? That old woman?" It was too ridiculous. Mr. Hutton laughed too.

"But it's quite true," he said. "She adores me." Oh, the vast joke! He would go and see her as soon as he returned — see and conquer. "I believe she wants to marry me," he added.

"But you wouldn't . . ."

The air was fairly crepitating with humor. Mr. Hutton laughed aloud. "I intend to marry you," he said. It seemed to him the best joke he had ever made in his life.

When Mr. Hutton left Southend he was once more a married man. It was agreed that, for the time being, the fact should be kept secret. In the autumn they would go abroad together, and the world should be informed. Meanwhile he was to go back to his own house and Doris to hers.

The day after his return he walked over in the afternoon to see Miss Spence. She received him with the old Gioconda.

"I was expecting you to come."

"I couldn't keep away," Mr. Hutton gallantly replied.

They sat in the summer-house. It was a pleasant place — a little old stucco temple bowered among dense bushes of evergreen. Miss Spence had left her mark on it by hanging up over the seat a blue-and-white Della Robbia plaque.

"I am thinking of going to Italy this autumn," said Mr. Hutton. He felt like a ginger-beer bottle, ready to pop with bubbling excitement.

"Italy. . . ." Miss Spence closed her eyes ecstatically. "I feel drawn there too."

"Why not let yourself be drawn?"

"I don't know. One somehow hasn't the energy to set out alone."

"Alone. . . ." Ah, sound of guitars and throaty singing! "Yes, traveling alone isn't much fun."

Miss Spence lay back in her chair without speaking. Her eyes were still closed. Mr. Hutton stroked his mustache. The silence prolonged itself.

Pressed to stay to dinner, Mr. Hutton did not refuse. The fun had hardly started. The table was laid in the loggia. Through its arches they looked out on to the sloping garden, to the valley below and the farther hills. Light ebbed away; the heat and silence were oppressive. A huge cloud was mounting up the sky, and there were distant breathings of thunder. The thunder drew nearer, a wind began to blow, and the first drops of rain fell. The table was cleared. Miss Spence and Mr. Hutton sat on in the growing darkness.

Miss Spence broke a long silence by saying meditatively:

"I think everyone has a right to a certain amount of happiness, don't you?"

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"Most certainly." But what was she leading up to? Nobody makes generalizations about life unless they mean to talk about themselves. Happiness: he looked back on his own life, and saw a cheerful, placid existence disturbed by no great griefs or discomforts or alarms. He had always had money and freedom; he had been able to do very much as he wanted. Yes, he supposed he had been happy — happier than most men. And now he was not merely happy; he had discovered in irresponsibility the secret of gaiety. He was about to say something of his happiness when Miss Spence went on speaking.

"People like you and me have a right to be happy some time in our lives."

"Me?" said Mr. Hutton, surprised.

"Poor Henry! Fate hasn't treated either of us very well."

"Oh, well, it might have treated me worse."

"You're being cheerful. That's brave of you. But don't think I can't see behind the mask."

Miss Spence spoke louder and louder as the rain came down more and more heavily. Periodically the thunder cut across her utterances. She talked on, shouting against the noise.

"I have understood you so well and for so long."

A flash revealed her, aimed and intent, leaning towards him. Her eyes were two profound and menacing gun-barrels. The darkness re-engulfed her.

"You were a lonely soul seeking a companion soul. I could sympathize with you in your solitude. Your marriage . . ."

The thunder cut short the sentence. Miss Spence's voice became audible once more with the words:

". . . could offer no companionship to a man of your stamp. You needed a soul mate."

A soul mate — he! a soul mate. It was incredibly fantastic. "Georgette Leblanc, the ex-soul mate of Maurice Maeterlinck." He had seen that in the paper a few days ago. So it was thus that Janet Spence had painted him in her imagination — as a soul-mater. And for Doris he was a picture of goodness and the cleverest man in the world. And actually, really, he was what? — Who knows?

"My heart went out to you. I could understand; I was lonely, too." Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. "You were so patient." Another flash. She was still armed, dangerously. "You never complained. But I could guess — I could guess."

"How wonderful of you!" So he was an *âme incomprise*. "Only a woman's intuition . . ."

The thunder crashed and rumbled, died away, and only the sound of the rain was left. The thunder was his laughter, magnified, externalized. Flash and crash, there it was again.

"Don't you feel that you have within you something that is akin to this storm?" He could imagine her leaning forward as she uttered the words. "Passion makes one the equal of the elements."

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What was his gambit now? Why, obviously, he should have said, "Yes," and ventured on some unequivocal gesture. But Mr. Hutton suddenly took fright. The ginger beer in him had gone flat. The woman was serious — terribly serious. He was appalled.

Passion? "No," he desperately answered. "I am without passion."

But his remark was either unheard or unheeded, for Miss Spence went on with a growing exaltation, speaking so rapidly, however, and in such a burningly intimate whisper that Mr. Hutton found it very difficult to distinguish what she was saying. She was telling him, as far as he could make out, the story of her life. The lightning was less frequent now, and there were long intervals of darkness. But at each flash he saw her still aiming towards him, still yearning forward with a terrifying intensity. Darkness, the rain, and then flash! her face was there, close at hand. A pale mask, greenish white; the large eyes, the narrow barrel of the mouth, the heavy eyebrows. Agrippina, or wasn't it rather — yes, wasn't it rather George Robey?

He began devising absurd plans for escaping. He might suddenly jump up, pretending he had seen a burglar — Stop thief! stop thief! — and dash off into the night in pursuit. Or should he say that he felt faint, a heart attack? or that he had seen a ghost — Emily's ghost — in the garden? Absorbed in his childish plotting, he had ceased to pay any attention to Miss Spence's words. The spasmodic clutching of her hand recalled his thoughts.

"I honored you for that, Henry," she was saying.

Honored him for what?

"Marriage is a sacred tie, and your respect for it, even when the marriage was, as it was in your case, an unhappy one, made me respect you and admire you, and — shall I dare say the word? ——"

Oh, the burglar, the ghost in the garden! But it was too late.

". . . yes, love you, Henry, all the more. But we're free now, Henry."

Free? There was a movement in the dark, and she was kneeling on the floor by his chair.

"Oh, Henry, Henry, I have been unhappy too."

Her arms embraced him, and by the shaking of her body he could feel that she was sobbing. She might have been a suppliant crying for mercy.

"You mustn't, Janet," he protested. Those tears were terrible, terrible. "Not now, not now! You must be calm; you must go to bed." He patted her shoulder, then got up, disengaging himself from her embrace. He left her still crouching on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting.

Groping his way into the hall, and without waiting to look for his hat, he went out of the house, taking infinite pains to close the front door noiselessly behind him. The clouds had blown over, and the moon was shining from a clear sky. There were puddles all along the road, and a noise of running water rose from the gutters and ditches. Mr. Hutton splashed

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along blindly, not caring if he got wet.

How heart-rendingly she had sobbed! With the emotions of pity and remorse that the recollection evoked in him there was a certain resentment: why couldn't she have played the game that he was playing — the heartless, amusing game? Yes, but he had known all the time that she wouldn't, she couldn't, play that game; he had known and persisted.

What had she said about passion and the elements? Something absurdly stale, but true, true. There she was, a cloud black-bosomed and charged with thunder, and he, like some absurd little Benjamin Franklin, had sent up a kite into the heart of the menace. Now he was complaining that his toy had drawn the lightning.

She was probably still kneeling by that chair in the loggia, crying.

But why hadn't he been able to keep up the game? Why had his irresponsibility deserted him, leaving him suddenly sober in a cold world? There were no answers to any of his questions. One idea burned steady and luminous in his mind — the idea of flight. He must get away at once.

"What are you thinking about, Teddy Bear?"

"Nothing."

There was a silence. Mr. Hutton remained motionless, his elbows on the parapet of the terrace, his chin in his hands, looking down over Florence. He had taken a villa on one of the hilltops to the south of the city. From a little raised terrace at the end of the garden one looked down a long fertile valley onto the town and beyond it to the bleak mass of Monte Morello and, eastward of it, to the peopled hill of Fiesole, dotted with white houses. Everything was clear and luminous in the September sunshine.

"Are you worried about anything?"

"No, thank you."

"Tell me, Teddy Bear."

"But, my dear, there's nothing to tell." Mr. Hutton turned round, smiled, and patted the girl's hand. "I think you'd better go in and have your siesta. It's too hot for you here."

"Very well, Teddy Bear. Are you coming too?"

"When I've finished my cigar."

"All right. But do hurry up and finish it, Teddy Bear." Slowly, reluctantly, she descended the steps of the terrace and walked towards the house.

Mr. Hutton continued his contemplation of Florence. He had need to be alone. It was good sometimes to escape from Doris and the restless solicitude of her passion. He had never known the pains of loving hopelessly, but he was experiencing now the pains of being loved. These last weeks had been a period of growing discomfort. Doris was always with him, like an obsession, like a guilty conscience. Yes, it was good to be alone.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and opened it, not without reluctance. He hated letters; they always contained something unpleasant — nowadays, since his second marriage. This was from his sister. He be-

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gan skimming through the insulting home-truths of which it was composed. The words "indecent haste," "social suicide," "scarcely cold in her grave," "person of the lower classes," all occurred. They were inevitable now in any communication from a well-meaning and right-thinking relative. Impatient, he was about to tear the stupid letter to pieces when his eye fell on a sentence at the bottom of the third page. His heart beat with uncomfortable violence as he read it. It was too monstrous! Janet Spence was going about telling everyone that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry Doris. What damnable malice! Ordinarily a man of the suavest temper, Mr. Hutton found himself trembling with rage. He took the childish satisfaction of calling names — he cursed the woman.

Then suddenly he saw the ridiculous side of the situation. The notion that he should have murdered anyone in order to marry Doris! If they only knew how miserably bored he was. Poor, dear Janet! She had tried to be malicious; she had only succeeded in being stupid.

A sound of footsteps aroused him; he looked round. In the garden below the little terrace the servant girl of the house was picking fruit. A Neopolitan, strayed somehow as far north as Florence, she was a specimen of the classical type — a little debased. Her profile might have been taken from a Sicilian coin of a bad period. Her features, carved floridly in the grand tradition, expressed an almost perfect stupidity. Her mouth was the most beautiful thing about her; the calligraphic hand of nature had richly curved it into an expression of mulish bad temper. . . . Under her hideous black clothes, Mr. Hutton divined a powerful body, firm and massive. He had looked at her before with a vague interest and curiosity. Today the curiosity defined and focused itself into a desire. An idyll of Theocritus. Here was the woman; he, alas, was not precisely like a goat-herd on the volcanic hills. He called to her.

The smile with which she answered him was so provocative, attested so easy a virtue, that Mr. Hutton took fright. He was on the brink once more — on the brink. He must draw back, oh! quickly, quickly, before it was too late. The girl continued to look up at him.

"*Ha chiamato?*" she asked at last.

Stupidity or reason? Oh, there was no choice now. It was imbecility every time.

"*Scendo*," he called back to her. Twelve steps led from the garden to the terrace. Mr. Hutton counted them. Down, down, down. . . . He saw a vision of himself descending from one circle of the inferno to the next — from a darkness full of wind and hail to an abyss of stinking mud.

For a good many days the Hutton case had a place on the front page of every newspaper. There had been no more popular murder trial since George Smith had temporarily eclipsed the European War by drowning in a

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warm bath his seventh bride. The public imagination was stirred by this tale of a murder brought to light months after the date of the crime. Here, it was felt, was one of those incidents in human life, so notable because they are so rare, which do definitely justify the ways of God to man. A wicked man had been moved by an illicit passion to kill his wife. For months he had lived in sin and fancied security — only to be dashed at last more horribly into the pit he had prepared for himself. *Murder will out*, and here was a case of it. The readers of the newspapers were in a position to follow every movement of the hand of God. There had been vague, but persistent, rumors in the neighborhood; the police had taken action at last. Then came the exhumation order, the post-mortem examination, the inquest, the evidence of the experts, the verdict of the coroner's jury, the trial, the condemnation. For once Providence had done its duty, obviously, grossly, didactically, as in a melodrama. The newspapers were right in making of the case the staple intellectual food of a whole season.

Mr. Hutton's first emotion when he was summoned from Italy to give evidence at the inquest was one of indignation. It was a monstrous, a scandalous thing that the police should take such idle, malicious gossip seriously. When the inquest was over he would bring an action of malicious prosecution against the Chief Constable; he would sue the Spence woman for slander.

The inquest was opened; the astonishing evidence unrolled itself. The experts had examined the body, and had found traces of arsenic; they were of the opinion that the late Mrs. Hutton had die of arsenic poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning. . . . Emily had died of arsenic poisoning? After that, Mr. Hutton learned with surprise that there was enough arsenicated insecticide in his greenhouses to poison an army.

It was now, quite suddenly, that he saw it: there was a case against him. Fascinated, he watched it growing, growing, like some monstrous tropical plant. It was enveloping him, surrounding him; he was lost in a tangled forest.

When was the poison administered? The experts agreed that it must have been swallowed eight or nine hours before death. About lunch-time? Yes, about lunch-time. Clara, the parlor-maid, was called. Mrs. Hutton, she remembered, had asked her to go and fetch her medicine. Mr. Hutton had volunteered to go instead; he had gone alone. Miss Spence — ah, the memory of the storm, the white aimed face! the horror of it all! — Miss Spence confirmed Clara's statement, and added that Mr. Hutton had come back with the medicine already poured out in a wine glass, not in the bottle.

Mr. Hutton's indignation evaporated. He was dismayed, frightened. It was all too fantastic to be taken seriously, and yet this nightmare was a fact — it was actually happening.

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M'Nab had seen them kissing, often. He had taken them for a drive on the day of Mrs. Hutton's death. He could see them reflected in the wind-shield, sometimes out of the tail of his eye.

The inquest was adjourned. That evening Doris went to bed with a headache. When he went to her room after dinner, Mr. Hutton found her crying.

"What's the matter?" He sat down on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her hair. For a long time she did not answer, and he went on stroking her hair mechanically, almost unconsciously; sometimes, even, he bent down and kissed her bare shoulder. He had his own affairs, however, to think about. What had happened? How was it that the stupid gossip had actually come true? Emily had died of arsenic poisoning. It was absurd, impossible. The order of things had been broken, and he was at the mercy of an irresponsibility. What had happened, what was going to happen? He was interrupted in the midst of his thoughts.

"It's my fault — it's my fault!" Doris suddenly sobbed out. "I shouldn't have loved you. I oughtn't to have let you love me. Why was I ever born?"

Mr. Hutton didn't say anything, but looked down in silence at the abject figure of misery lying on the bed.

"If they do anything to you I shall kill myself."

She sat up, held him for a moment at arm's length, and looked at him with a kind of violence, as though she were never to see him again.

"I love you, I love you, I love you." She drew him, inert and passive, towards her, clasped him, pressed herself against him. "I didn't know you loved me as much as that, Teddy Bear. But why did you do it — why did you do it?"

Mr. Hutton undid her clasping arms and got up. His face became very red. "You seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife," he said. "It's really too grotesque. What do you all take me for? A cinema hero?" He had begun to lose his temper. All the exasperation, all the fear and bewilderment of the day, was transformed into a violent anger against her. "It's all such damned stupidity. Haven't you any conception of a civilized man's mentality? Do I look the sort of man who'd go about slaughtering people? I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love with you that I could commit any folly. When will you women understand that one isn't insanely in love? All one asks for is a quiet life, which you won't allow one to have. I don't know what the devil ever induced me to marry you. It was all a damned stupid, practical joke. And now you go about saying I'm a murderer. I won't stand it."

Mr. Hutton stamped towards the door. He had said horrible things, he knew — odious things that he ought speedily to unsay. But he wouldn't. He closed the door behind him.

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"Teddy Bear!" He turned the handle; the latch clicked into place. "Teddy Bear!" The voice that came to him through the closed door was agonized. Should he go back? He ought to go back. He touched the handle, then withdrew his fingers and quickly walked away. When he was halfway down the stairs he halted. She might try to do something silly — throw herself out of the window or God knows what! He listened attentively; there was no sound. But he pictured her very clearly, tiptoeing across the room, lifting the sash as high as it would go, leaning out into the cold night air. It was raining a little. Under the window lay the paved terrace. How far below? Twenty-five or thirty feet? Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of a third-story window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall; he had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would; he hated her.

He sat for a long time in the library. What had happened? What was happening? He turned the question over and over in his mind and could find no answer. Suppose the nightmare dreamed itself out to its horrible conclusion. Death was waiting for him. His eyes filled with tears; he wanted so passionately to live. "Just to be alive." Poor Emily had wished it too, he remembered: "Just to be alive." There were still so many places in this astonishing world unvisited, so many queer delightful people still unknown, so many lovely women never so much as seen. The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines — Tear of Christ and Blood of Judas — others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lanes between the bookshelves in the London library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground. And why, why? Confusedly he felt that some extraordinary kind of justice was being done. In the past he had been wanton and imbecile and irresponsible. Now Fate was playing as wantonly, as irresponsibly, with him. It was tit for tat, and God existed after all.

He felt that he would like to pray. Forty years ago he used to kneel by his bed every evening. The nightly formula of his childhood came to him almost unsought from some long unopened chamber of the memory. "God bless Father and Mother, Tom and Cissie and the Baby, Mademoiselle and Nurse, and everyone that I love, and make me a good boy. Amen." They were all dead now — all except Cissie.

His mind seemed to soften and dissolve; a great calm descended upon his spirit. He went upstairs to ask Doris's forgiveness. He found her ly-

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ing on the couch at the foot of the bed. On the floor beside her stood a blue bottle of liniment, marked *Not to be taken internally;* she seemed to have drunk about half of it.

"You didn't love me," was all she said when she opened her eyes to find him bending over her.

Dr. Libbard arrived in time to prevent any serious consequences. "You mustn't do this again," he said while Mr. Hutton was out of the room.

"What's to prevent me?" she asked defiantly.

Dr. Libbard looked at her with his large, sad eyes. "There's nothing to prevent you," he said. "Only yourself and your baby. Isn't it rather bad luck on your baby, not allowing it to come into the world because you want to go out of it?"

Doris was silent for a time. "All right," she whispered. "I won't."

Mr. Hutton sat by her bedside for the rest of the night. He felt himself now to be indeed a murderer. For a time he persuaded himself that he loved this pitiable child. Dozing in his chair, he woke up, stiff and cold, to find himself drained dry, as it were, of every emotion. He had become nothing but a tired and suffering carcass. At six o'clock he undressed and went to bed for a couple of hours' sleep. In the course of the same afternoon the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Willful Murder," and Mr. Hutton was committed for trial.

Miss Spence was not at all well. She had found her public appearances in the witness-box very trying, and when it was all over she had something that was very nearly a breakdown. She slept badly, and suffered from nervous indigestion. Dr. Libbard used to call every other day. She talked to him a great deal—mostly about the Hutton case. . . . Her moral indignation was always on the boil. Wasn't it appalling to think that one had had a murderer in one's house? Wasn't it extraordinary that one could have been for so long mistaken about the man's character? (But she had had an inkling from the first.) And then the girl he had gone off with — so low class, so little better than a prostitute. The news that the second Mrs. Hutton was expecting a baby — the posthumous child of a condemned and executed criminal — revolted her; the thing was shocking — an obscenity. Dr. Libbard answered her gently and vaguely, and prescribed bromide.

One morning he interrupted her in the midst of her customary tirade. "By the way," he said in his soft, melancholy voice, "I suppose it was really you who poisoned Mrs. Hutton."

Miss Spence stared at him for two or three seconds with enormous eyes, and then quietly said, "Yes." After that she started to cry.

"In the coffee, I suppose."

She seemed to nod assent. Dr. Libbard took out his fountain pen, and in his neat, meticulous calligraphy wrote out a prescription for a sleeping powder.

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The late Alexander Woollcott was a legendary litterateur. He possessed fabulous foibles and idiotic idiosyncrasies. He was capable of whopping whimwhams and whacking whimsies. He was at times the most saccharine of sentimentalists. But he had another side to his persuasive personality. As someone has said, "no one could tell a supernatural story as he could." And few could match him in the quiet evocation of distilled dread and humpbacked horror.

"Moonlight Sonata" is not supernatural, but for that matter it is equally not natural. As Woollcott himself described the tale, it is "the adventure of a young medico, who spent a night under an ancient roof in Kent and with his own eyes beheld some spectral fancywork."

Don't turn the lights too low . . .

MOONLIGHT SONATA

by ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

IF THIS report were to be published in its own England, I would have to cross my fingers in a little foreword explaining that all the characters were fictitious — which stern requirement of the British libel law would embarrass me slightly because none of the characters is fictitious, and the story — told to Katharine Cornell by Clemence Dane and by Katharine Cornell told to me — chronicled what, to the best of my knowledge and belief, actually befell a young English physician whom I shall call Alvan Barach, because that does not happen to be his name. It is an account of a hitherto unreported adventure he had two years ago when he went down into Kent to visit an old friend — let us call him Ellery Cazalet — who spent most of his days on the links and most of his nights wondering how he would ever pay the death duties on the collapsing family manor-house to which he had indignantly fallen heir.

This house was a shabby little cousin to Compton Wynyates, with roof-tiles of Tudor red making it cozy in the noon-day sun and a hoarse bell which, from the clock tower, had been contemptuously scattering the hours like coins ever since Henry VIII was a rosy stripling. Within, Cazalet could afford only a doddering couple to fend for him, and the once sumptuous gardens did much as they pleased under the care of a single gardener. I think I must risk giving the gardener's real name, for none I could invent would have so appropriate a flavor.

It was John Scripture, and he was assisted, from time to time, by an aged and lunatic father who, in his lucid intervals, would be let out from his captivity under the eaves of the

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lodge to putter amid the lewd topiarian extravagance of the hedges.

The doctor was to come down when he could, with a promise of some good golf, long nights of exquisite silence, and a ghost or two thrown in — his fancy ran that way. It was a characteristic of his rather ponderous humor that, in writing to fix a day, he addressed Cazalet at *The Creeps, Sevenoaks, Kent.* When he arrived, it was to find his host away from home and not due back until all hours. Barach was to dine alone with a reproachful setter for companion, and not wait up. His bedroom on the ground floor was beautifully paneled from footboard to ceiling, but some misguided housekeeper under the fourth George had fallen upon the lovely woodwork with a can of black varnish. The dowry brought by a Cazalet bride of the mauve decade had been invested in a few vintage bathrooms, and one of these had replaced a prayer closet that once opened into this bedroom. There was only a candle to read by, but the light of a full moon came waveringly through the wind-stirred vines that half-curtained the mullioned windows.

In this museum, Barach dropped off to sleep. He did not know how long he had slept when he found himself awake again, and conscious that something was astir in the room. It took him a moment to place the movement, but at last, in a patch of moonlight, he made out a hunched figure that seemed to be sitting with bent, engrossed head in the chair by the door. It was the hand, or rather the whole arm, that was moving, tracing a recurrent if irregular course in the air. At first, the gesture was teasingly half-familiar, and then Barach recognized it as the one a woman makes when embroidering. There would be a hesitation as if the needle were being thrust through some taut, resistant material, and then, each time, the long, swift, sure pull of the thread.

To the startled guest, this seemed the least menacing activity he had ever heard ascribed to a ghost, but just the same he had only one idea, and that was to get out of that room with all possible dispatch. His mind made a hasty reconnaissance. The door into the hall was out of the question, for madness lay that way. At least he would have to pass right by that weaving arm. Nor did he relish a blind plunge into the thorny shrubbery beneath his window, and a barefoot scamper across the frosty turf. Of course, there was the bathroom, but that was small comfort if he could not get out of it by another door. In a spasm of concentration he remembered that he had seen another door. Just at the moment of this realization, he heard the comfortingly actual sound of a car coming up the drive, and guessed that it was his host returning. In one magnificent movement he leaped to the floor, bounded into the bathroom, and bolted its door behind him. The floor of the room beyond was quilted with moonlight. Wading through that, he arrived breathless, but unmolested, in

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the corridor. Farther along he could see the lamp left burning in the entrance hall and hear the clatter of his host closing the front door.

As Barach came hurrying out of the darkness to greet him, Cazalet boomed his delight at such affability, and famished by his long, cold ride, proposed an immediate raid on the larder. The doctor, already sheepish at his recent panic, said nothing about it, and was all for food at once. With lighted candles held high, the foraging party descended on the offices, and mine host was descanting on the merits of cold roast beef, Cheddar cheese, and milk as a light midnight snack when he stumbled over a bundle on the floor. With a cheerful curse at the old goody of the kitchen who was always leaving something about, he bent to see what it was this time, and let out a whistle of surprise. Then, by two candles held low, he and the doctor saw something they will not forget while they live. It was the body of the cook. Just the body. The head was gone. On the floor alongside lay a bloody cleaver.

"Old Scripture, by God!" Cazalet cried out, and in a flash Barach guessed. Still clutching a candle in one hand, he dragged his companion back through the interminable house to the room from which he had fled, motioning him to be silent, tiptoeing the final steps. That precaution was wasted, for a regiment could not have disturbed the rapt contentment of the ceremony still in progress within. The old lunatic had not left his seat by the door. Between his knees he still held the head of the woman he had killed. Scrupulously, happily, crooning at his work, he was plucking out the gray hairs one by one.

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Another modern radio drama written by John Dickson Carr for the program called "Suspense," and wave-lengthed in 1942 over the Columbia Broadcasting System . . . Another radio adventure compounded of misanthropy, mischief, misconduct, misdirection, misery, misfortune, misgivings, misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and general mystification . . . The question is: How could a bride of less than two weeks walk out on the balcony of a palatial villa in Capri — walk out alone — and vanish!

THE BRIDE VANISHES

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The Characters

TOM COURTNEY . . . . . *a newlywed*
LUCY COURTNEY . . . . . *his wife*
HARRY GRANGER . . . . . *a retired oil-man*
COUNTESS LUCHESI . . . . . *a devotee of excitement*
DR. RUTHERFORD DAVIS . . . . . *a specialist in brain diseases*
and a BOATMAN, *a* DOG *named Tiberius, etc.*

Italy, in the springtime. Italy, as we used to know it before the jackal struck. And the island of Capri, twenty miles out across the Bay of Naples . . . Blue water adazzle under the sun. Behind you the bone-white beaches, and Vesuvius dull purple in a heat-haze. Ahead, as the little steamer from Naples chugs out across the bay, rises Capri . . . Olive-trees and white roads and vineyards above the cliffs. Could young Americans find a better place to spend their honeymoon? While the guitars sing, and the warm winds blow, and the little steamer carries them?

(Tom Courtney is about twenty-eight; Lucy, his wife, is four years younger. Both are trying to be very casual)

TOM: Well, Mrs. Courtney?

LUCY: Well, Mr. Courtney?

TOM: I can't keep it up, Lucy. I'm going to break down and ask if you're happy.

LUCY: I'll break down too. I want to walk up to everybody I meet and say "Whee!" Just like that.

TOM: What *I* want to do is turn somersaults, myself.

LUCY: I want to say, "I've been married to Tom Courtney for practically two weeks. And now we're going to have a villa at Capri for a month." Oh, Tom, I ought to be the happiest woman in the world — only —

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TOM: (*Sharply*) You shivered! What's wrong?

LUCY: Ever since we got aboard this ship, people have been staring at me.

TOM: I can't blame 'em for *that.*

LUCY: No! I mean — in a funny way! And muttering! Even your American friend — what's his name?

TOM: Granger?

LUCY: Mr. Granger. When you introduced him to me at Naples, I thought his eyes were going to pop out.

TOM: Be careful, dear! He's standing over by the rail now. He lives at Capri.

LUCY: (*Giggling*) I'd like to see him wearing that white ten-gallon hat in Italy.

TOM: Before Granger made money in oil-wells, he was a real old-fashioned cowpuncher. And he's proud of it. Good fellow, too.

LUCY: He's too polite to say anything, but he keeps looking around at me, just the same as the rest of them do, Tom.

TOM: Well?

LUCY: They look *scared.*

TOM: (*Worried*) You know, Lucy, this isn't the time to start imagining things.

LUCY: I know. Maybe I'm just so happy I'm afraid it can't last.

TOM: Don't *say* that!

LUCY: But wouldn't it be awful if something did happen? And we weren't together any longer?

TOM: Wait a minute. Hasn't this ship stopped?

LUCY: Yes. That *is* Capri up ahead of us, isn't it?

TOM: It can't be anything else. But it seems a funny place to stop. No sign of a harbor — only rocks and little gray cliffs. (*Calling*) Mr. Granger! Mr. Granger!

(*Granger is about sixty; he is a robust, genial, good-natured man with a natural courtesy of manner; just now he is very worried*)

GRANGER: Yes, young fellow?

TOM: Do you happen to know why we're stopping here?

GRANGER: That's an easy one, son. We're stopping so that you and your good lady — and anybody else who's curious — can get a look at the Blue Grotto.

LUCY: The Blue Grotto! Of course!

GRANGER: Shade your eyes with your hand, ma'am. You see that tiny little arch under the cliff?

LUCY: Yes?

GRANGER: And all the little white rowboats coming out towards us?

LUCY: Yes!

GRANGER: When the first boat comes alongside, climb down that iron ladder and get in. The boatman'll row you out and through the arch into the grotto. It's a big dark cavern. The water in there looks as though it's lit up underneath with blue fire.

TOM: Like to go out and see it, Lucy?

LUCY: I'd love to!

GRANGER: Let me give you a little tip, though. The current's pretty fast out there. You'll go shooting under that arch like sixty.

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LUCY: Are we likely to upset?

GRANGER: No. But the arch isn't as high as your head. When you see it coming lie back flat in the boat. That is, unless you want your block knocked off.

TOM: Thanks, Mr. Granger. We'll remember.

TOM: Easy on the ladder, Lucy! Don't look round yet!

LUCY: I'm all right, darling, and just as good a swimmer as you are.

TOM: I'm in the boat now. Take one more step . . . steady . . . now turn around, facing the boatman, and sit down here beside . . .

BOATMAN: (*Terrified*) *CORPO DI BACCO!*

LUCY: What's the matter with the boatman?

TOM: Easy, man! Do you want to upset us? Sit down!

BOATMAN: Si, Signor. (*To Lucy*) You . . . come . . . back. Yes?

LUCY: Come back? I've never been here before in my life!

TOM: Push off, man! Start rowing! The other boats are piling up behind you!

BOATMAN: You . . . come . . . back.

TOM: Start rowing, can't you? *Andare subito! Basta!* (*The boat starts moving*)

LUCY: (*Whispering*) Tom, he can't take his eyes off me!

TOM: I wish he'd watch where he's rowing!

BOATMAN: You come to live at the Villa Borghese, yes?

LUCY: Tom, how does he know that?

BOATMAN: Theesa lady . . . she eesa not dead?

TOM: Dead? Of course she's not dead! What are you talking about?

BOATMAN: She never come to Capri before?

TOM: Never!

BOATMAN: Then I tella you. She will disappear, justa like de other one.

LUCY: Disappear?

BOATMAN: I rest on my oars, and I tella you.

LUCY: Tom, aren't we moving rather fast?

TOM: Yes. That's the entrance to the grotto ahead.

BOATMAN: I tella you. There was a lady. So mucha like you it . . . *corpo di Bacco!* It scare me.

TOM: Look, old man, I don't want to teach you your business, but you've got your back to that grotto!

BOATMAN: Take theese lady back where she came from! Don't take her to the Villa Borghese!

TOM: Down, Lucy! Flat on your back! Down!

(*A loud rushing of water, then the noise of water fades*)

BOATMAN: (*Contritely*) Signora! Signora! I am sorry! I almost make you get hurt!

TOM: Do you know you nearly got your own head knocked off?

BOATMAN: Scusa me, no! I am used to it! Now I weel row you round the Blue Grott'. (*The boat starts again*)

LUCY: I don't think I like the Grotto much, Tom.

TOM: Neither do I.

LUCY: Dark—except for that blue

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light under the water. It's transparent. You can see the fish swimming.

TOM: Just a minute, boatman! This lady who disappeared from the Villa Borghese —

BOATMAN: Two, three year ago she disappear.

TOM: You say she looked exactly like my wife?

BOATMAN: Si, signor! She was a-going to be married. She was trying on what you calla her wedding-dress. Her mother anda sisters, they were in da room with her. She walk out on a balcony over da sea. You know what I mean by a balcony over da sea? And nobody has ever heard of her again.

LUCY: You mean . . . she jumped over into the sea?

BOATMAN: A young girl a-going to be married? Keel herself? No, no, no!

TOM: Then what did happen?

BOATMAN: *Corpo di Bacco*, I don't know! But somatimes, they say, you can meet her ghost. Ina here. She float just under the water, where you can see her. And turn over and over. And the wedding-veil is still round her face.

LUCY: Tom — let's get out of here!

BOATMAN: You want to go? *Yes?*

TOM: Lucy, if this fellow is stringing us along —

LUCY: He's not — I'm sure of it!

TOM: Then somebody ought to know what this means. If we've inherited a haunted balcony, where people disappear like soap-bubbles, I say it's too much! Let's get back to our ship and talk to Granger! Yes, boatman, take us back —

LUCY: Mr. Granger! Mr. Granger!

GRANGER: Climb aboard, ma'am. And you too, young fellow. This ship's starting in half a second.

LUCY: Didn't anybody else go to the Blue Grotto?

GRANGER: (*Embarrassed*) Well, ma'am — no. (*Hesitates*) Not after they saw *you* go.

TOM: It's all right — we've just heard the story, Mr. Granger.

GRANGER: I ought to have told you about it myself! All the way out here I've been cussing myself, and thinking what an ornery old badger I am, for not telling you when I first met you in Naples!

TOM: The girl *did* vanish, then?

GRANGER: By a miracle — yes. In broad daylight, and within twenty feet of her mother and sisters.

TOM: You don't look like a man who believes in miracles, Mr. Granger.

GRANGER: I'm not, son. I'm just telling you what happened.

TOM: But why is everybody so excited? Somebody must have thrown her off the balcony?

GRANGER: Josephine Adams was all alone on a balcony forty feet up a cliff smooth as glass. She didn't fall, and she wasn't thrown, because there was no sound of a splash. She didn't come back from the balcony, because her mother and sisters were in front of the only door. Yet within fifteen seconds — *fifteen seconds*, mind you — she vanished!

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TOM: (*Incredulously*) You believe that?

GRANGER: Sure I believe it, son. It's a fact.

LUCY: Did you know the girl's family?

GRANGER: Very well. We've got a real English-speaking colony here. In about half a minute, now, I'm going to show you your new home.

LUCY: Can we see it from the ship?

GRANGER: You sure can, ma'am. It's on the edge of the cliff. Dr. Davis's house is on one side of it, and my shack's on the other. (*Hesitates*) That's why I want to ask you a question.

LUCY: Of course. Ask anything you like.

GRANGER: I'm an old stager, ma'am, and not exactly up to the high-toned society around here. But — do you trust me?

LUCY: Yes, I think so.

GRANGER: Then promise me something. Unless you're with somebody you trust, *keep away from that balcony.*

TOM: Do you honestly think there's danger of . . . ?

GRANGER: I don't know, son! If I did know, I wouldn't have to talk this way! (*Barking of dog*)

LUCY: That sounds like a dog barking! I thought I heard it before.

TOM: It is — a big police-dog. And led by a very handsome woman, if you ask me.

GRANGER: Oh, Lord! Here she is again!

TOM: Who?

GRANGER: The Countess. She's one of our colony.

LUCY: She looks like an American. (*Whispering*) You take your eyes off her, Tom Courtney!

GRANGER: She *is* an American. Married a Count Parcheesi, or something like that. Just call her Nellie. (*Nellie is in her late thirties; she has the breezy, drawling, offhand voice of someone eagerly interested in everything*)

NELLIE: My dear Mr. Granger!

GRANGER: Hello, Nellie.

NELLIE: It's true! Everybody told me so, but I couldn't believe it until I saw her! She *does* look exactly like poor Josephine Adams. Just as small, just as dainty, and just as pretty —

LUCY: Please! Is *everybody* trying to give me the jitters?

GRANGER: Nellie, I want you to meet some friends of mine.

NELLIE: You don't need to introduce me! I know who they are! You're the nice young couple who've taken that villa. I'm Nellie Luchesi . . . (*The dog barks*) And this is my dog, Tiberius. Named after the wicked Roman Emperor, you know, who used to live at Capri. I must confess I'm terribly fascinated by wicked things. Aren't you, Mr. Courtney?

TOM: (*Muttering*) Lucy, stop digging me in the ribs! I haven't done anything!

LUCY: No, and you're not going to.

NELLIE: Tiberius seems to have taken quite a fancy to you, Mrs. Court-

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ney. I've never known him to go up to a stranger before.

LUCY: I only wish I could borrow him. He might be a charm against . . . oh, I don't know!

NELLIE: We'll be at the harbor in a few minutes. Then you must let me drive you up to the villa. You won't be able to get any servants, I'm afraid, because they won't stay there. But you can camp out . . . Look! There's the villa! We're passing it now.

LUCY: Where?

NELLIE: On the cliff! Where I'm pointing.

TOM: (*Sharply*) Wait a minute. There must be some mistake. That's not the Villa Borghese?

GRANGER: It sure is, son.

TOM: But that's a palace! Like all the other houses there. And I rented it, furnished, for about twenty-five dollars a month!

GRANGER: Can't you guess why you got it so cheap, son? If you take my advice, you'll turn around and go back to Naples by the next steamer!

NELLIE: Harry Granger, don't be an idiot! Let's have some excitement! (*Through her teeth*) Let's have some *excitement!*

LUCY: Tom, it *is* beautiful!

TOM: Too infernally beautiful, if you ask me.

NELLIE: There's the balcony!

GRANGER: It's all right by daylight, son — marble and tapestries and whatnot. But at night, when you've got to put out the lights, and you start thinking what happened there, what *might* happen . . .

The moon, over Capri, makes a deathly light. You could see clearly enough to read on that balcony — if anyone went out there. Frosted-glass doors open out on it from a big room on the ground floor, where two determinedly calm persons — and a dog — sit looking at each other. It is that evening . . .

TOM: Lucy, stop it!

LUCY: Stop what?

TOM: Stop looking over at that balcony!

LUCY: I'm sorry, darling.

TOM: Why are we sitting here anyway? There's an outer room that's much more comfortable.

LUCY: It's like having a toothache. A very *little* toothache.

TOM: I may be dense, angel, but I don't follow you.

LUCY: You put your tongue against the tooth, to see if it'll hurt. You know it will hurt. But you go on doing it just the same. That's us.

TOM: Maybe you're right.

LUCY: Tom, did you ever think we'd live in a lovely house like this?

TOM: The house is all right. But they have to go and spoil everything — our honeymoon — with this blasted tommyrot about . . .

LUCY: Tom, you're as jittery now as I was this afternoon! Even Tiberius is jittery.

TOM: Yes, I guess I am . . . Easy, boy! Easy!

LUCY: There's whiskey on the table.

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They call it veeky here. Mix yourself a drink.

TOM: In a minute. Not just now . . . Lucy, there's nothing wrong with that balcony. Suppose you walked out there this minute . . .

LUCY: I've had a horrible longing to try it, just because I know I shouldn't.

TOM: Nothing could attack you. All you'd have to do would be yell. That would bring Mr. Granger out on his balcony like a shot. And the neighbor on the other side of us. Who is on the other side, by the way?

LUCY: A loony-doctor.

TOM: A *what?*

LUCY: A specialist in brain diseases. Dr. Davis. He's English. (*Pauses*) Listen!

(*The dog begins to bark furiously. This is followed by a scratching sound from outside*)

TOM: It's somebody in the outer room. Easy, Tiberius, easy!

LUCY: Tom, I'm afraid!

TOM: It's all right. You hold Tiberius's collar while I open the door. We don't want him to fly at anybody. We're going into the other room and stay there. Ready?

LUCY: Yes. (*Door opens. Dr. Davis enters. His voice suggests a thin middle-aged man with a dry precise manner*)

DAVIS: Good evening, Mrs. Courtney. Good evening, Mr. Courtney. I am no ghost, believe me. I am merely your neighbor, Dr. Rutherford Davis.

LUCY: Oh! Yes, of course. Mr. Granger mentioned you.

DAVIS: I trust you will pardon this intrusion? No one answered my knock, so I ventured to come in.

TOM: It's no intrusion, Dr. Davis. We're — a little disorganized here, that's all.

DAVIS: Naturally. Mr. Courtney, I wish I could say, "Welcome to Capri." But I have a very different message.

TOM: Yes?

DAVIS: (*With great intensity*) If you value Mrs. Courtney's life, sir, go back to Naples immediately.

TOM: Not you, too!

DAVIS: I do not say that as a ghost-hunter, sir. I say it as a medical man. May I sit down?

LUCY: Of course! Please do!

DAVIS: Thank you.

TOM: We seem to be forgetting our manners, Dr. Davis. Will you — have a drink?

DAVIS: Thank you. Perhaps a small whiskey?

LUCY: *I'll* get it, darling. You sit down and talk to Dr. Davis.

TOM: You're not going back into that room alone?

LUCY: I'm only going to get the drinks, Tom! I promise to be good. And Tiberius can come with me. Won't you, Tiberius?

DAVIS: You've borrowed Tiberius from the Countess Luchesi, I see.

LUCY: Yes. She was kind enough to offer him. Excuse me. I'll be back in a minute. Come on, Tiberius!

(*Dog barks. Door opens and closes*)

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TOM: I hope this is all right!

DAVIS: No, sir, it is *not* all right. Your wife is in very great danger.

TOM: But why? Because of that balcony?

DAVIS: No. Because she looks exactly like the late Josephine Adams.

TOM: I don't get it.

DAVIS: Mr. Courtney, did you ever hear of paranoia?

TOM: It's some kind of mental disease, isn't it?

DAVIS: The paranoiac begins by imagining that he — or she — is being persecuted by someone. First he hears things. A voice in his brain whispers, "You'll be killed, you'll be killed, you'll be killed." He hears it in the tick of a clock, in the rattle of a train, in the footsteps on a street. There are holes in the walls through which his enemy is always watching. Invisible speaking-tubes bring him messages. There are pains in his joints, and nightmares of attempts to poison. His brain bursts, and he kills — kills — kills — Excuse me for speaking so — strongly.

TOM: But how does this affect us?

DAVIS: Mr. Courtney, will you examine this sheet of paper?

TOM: What is it?

DAVIS: The fragment of a typewritten diary. I found it on the cliffs months ago. Don't ask me who wrote it! But I know there's a criminal lunatic on this island. He imagined that poor, inoffensive Josephine Adams was his enemy. So he killed her.

TOM: Killed her? *How?*

DAVIS: I don't know.

TOM: And what happened to the girl's body?

DAVIS: I am not a detective, sir. The body was carried out to sea, perhaps. Or washed along the cliffs and into the Blue Grotto to be lost. But don't you understand the danger to your wife?

TOM: You're not suggesting . . . ?

DAVIS: To somebody's cracked brain your wife is Josephine Adams all over again.

TOM: Kill Lucy? It couldn't be done!

DAVIS: It *was* done, my friend. — Listen!

TOM: That sounded . . . like a dog howling.

DAVIS: Mrs. Courtney is rather a long time in getting that whiskey.

TOM: She wouldn't go near the balcony! She promised not to go out on the balcony!

DAVIS: People sometimes do perverse things, my friend.

TOM: *Lucy! LUCY!*

DAVIS: That seems to be Tiberius, out on the balcony. I can't see anything else from here.

TOM: She's gone. She's gone. She's . . . *gone!*

An empty balcony. A howling dog. And a sea turned clear silver under the moon. Then, after the tumult and the shouting, there are other pictures. Do you hear the noise of that motor-launch, with a half-demented young man at the wheel? Three other familiar figures are gathered round it.

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Don't you recognize the brunette prettiness of Nellie Luchesi? And the white ten-gallon hat of Harry Granger? And the neat pointed beard of Dr. Davis . . .

NELLIE: But what on earth is he going to *do* out here in this motor-boat?

GRANGER: I'd like to know too.

TOM: Listen! Please! All of you!

GRANGER: Take it easy, son.

TOM: What time is it?

GRANGER: Time?

TOM: Yes! What time is it?

NELLIE: It's half-past two in the morning.

TOM: Then the tide ought to be just where it was this afternoon.

GRANGER: What's the tide got to do with it?

TOM: A whole lot. Somebody set a trap and made Lucy fall off that balcony. I know it!

NELLIE: That's absurd!

TOM: If Lucy's been carried out to sea, there's nothing we can do about it. But if she's been carried along with the current, and into the Blue Grotto . . .

NELLIE: The Blue Grotto?

DAVIS: One moment, sir. You are not proposing to run this big launch under that arch after dark?

TOM: Yes, Doctor. That's just exactly what I do propose.

NELLIE: Go on! Do it! I'll back you up! Let's have some excitement!

DAVIS: It will be exciting enough, I assure you. Mr. Courtney have you some wild hope of recovering your wife's body?

TOM: I've even got a wild hope she may be alive. Lucy's a very strong swimmer.

GRANGER: You're acting like a nut, son!

TOM: Get set, everybody. I'm going to swing around.

NELLIE: We're in the current now. Better hold tight.

TOM: I've got to duck my own head when we go through. Everybody else — flop down!

DAVIS: I still protest! Don't you understand, Mr. Courtney, that . . .

TOM: Get ready. Here we go! (*Long pause*)

NELLIE: What on earth is wrong? There's no Blue Grotto. It's as black as pitch in here!

DAVIS: My dear Nellie, I kept trying to tell all of you. The "blue grotto" effect is caused by the sun's rays. There never is a "blue grotto" except when the sun is out. Just how does our friend expect to find anything in this pitch-black darkness?

TOM: *LISTEN!* (*Sound of splashings*)

NELLIE: Something's got hold of the side of the boat! I felt it move!

DAVIS: Not the dead girl, I trust?

TOM: There's a hand here . . . a wet hand . . . *Lucy!*

NELLIE: She's not . . . *alive?*

TOM: Mr. Granger, help me lift her up over the side. Easy! Don't tip the boat! Lucy! Are you all right?

LUCY: To-om! To-om! (*Coughs*)

TOM: Are you all right, Lucy? Can you hear me?

LUCY: (*Panting*) All ri'. Jus' exhausted.

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Got in here — couldn't — swim out — 'gainst current.

TOM: Don't try to talk . . .

LUCY: (*Desperately*) Got to talk. Going to faint. Tom! Who's with you?

TOM: Only our friends.

LUCY: Who's with you? Is . . . the murderer with you?

DAVIS: I was just wondering the same thing. To be shut up in the dark, at nearly three o'clock in the morning, with a criminal lunatic . . .

LUCY: (*Terrified*) Who spoke then?

TOM: Lucy, don't hold me so tight! Let go! I'll get the boat started and have you out of here in a second!

LUCY: Who spoke then?

TOM: Only Dr. Davis.

LUCY: Tom . . . got to tell you . . . know how that girl, Josephine Adams . . . died . . . almost killed . . . *me.*

TOM: Has anybody here got some brandy? Or a flashlight?

DAVIS: I have a flashlight. Will you allow me, as a medical man, to examine Mrs. Courtney?

TOM: She's hysterical, Doctor. Try to calm her down. Here, give me the flashlight.

LUCY: I walked into — other room. Nobody with me. All alone. Except Tiberius.

DAVIS: Yes, Mrs. Courtney?

LUCY: Somebody — called my name. From the balcony, I thought. Very soft. "Mrs. Courtney!" it said, "Mrs. Court-ney!"

TOM: Did you recognize the voice?

LUCY: Yes. That's why I went.

NELLIE: Hadn't you better start up this boat and get out of here?

LUCY: (*Terrified*) Who spoke *then?*

TOM: Don't pay any attention, Lucy. Nobody can hurt you now.

LUCY: I went out on the balcony. Bright moonlight — bright as day. But there was . . . nobody there.

TOM: Nobody on the balcony?

LUCY: No. I looked out over the sea. And something came at me. Something flew out of the air and came at me!

DAVIS: Just one moment, before Mrs. Courtney goes on. Is anybody in this boat carrying a revolver?

TOM: Not that I know of.

DAVIS: Excuse my mentioning it, but I felt something like that — metal, and in the shape of a revolver — brush past my hand.

NELLIE: It was only the flashlight, probably.

DAVIS: Excuse me, it was *not* a flashlight. Mr. Courtney's got the flashlight.

TOM: Will you please let Lucy go on and finish? Lucy, you were on the balcony, and something came at you —

LUCY: Yes! Like a snake! Sideways. Out of the air. It went over my head and fastened round my neck. It was a rope . . .

TOM: A rope?

LUCY: That's it! A rope. It was thrown . . . from another balcony. I'm small and light. Like Josephine Adams. It pulled me sideways, and over the rail. I fell.

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TOM: I think I begin to understand.

LUCY: They couldn't see what happened to Josephine Adams. Frosted-glass doors to balcony. So they couldn't see.

TOM: Take it easy now — you're perfectly safe, Lucy.

DAVIS: *Is* she perfectly safe?

LUCY: The murderer . . . let her fall. But the rope was jerked tight long before she struck the water. That broke her neck! Then the murderer lowered her, softly.

TOM: So there wasn't any splash! And the current took her away, rope and all.

LUCY: That's it! It would have happened to me . . . only . . . the rope must have slipped through the murderer's fingers.

TOM: Through *whose* fingers?
(*A pistol shot*)

DAVIS: What did I tell you? Somebody in this boat *has* got a revolver!
(*A heavy splash*)

TOM: Who went overboard?

DAVIS: Switch on that light and shine it on the water!

TOM: All right, Doctor. There's your light. (*Pause*) Look at it! Turning over and over! The water in the Blue Grotto is red now.

LUCY: Tom! Stay close to me!

TOM: It's all right, Lucy. I swear you're safe now.

LUCY: Did he . . . shoot himself?

TOM: Yes.

NELLIE: Did *who* shoot himself?

TOM: Who had a balcony exactly like ours, on the house next door? Who began life as a cow-puncher, and would have known how to use a lasso?

DAVIS: Who knew Josephine Adams well, and got it into his maniac head that Mrs. Courtney was Josephine Adams all over again?

TOM: Harry Granger! Look! There's his ten-gallon hat floating away!
(*Music up*)

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GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

He is a plump man who has the pinkly healthy complexion of a schoolboy. His face is round and cherubic, dominated by a pair of large, pathetic, and rather plaintive eyes with which he views his fellow-man with sadness and patience. Despite his appearance of chronic reproachfulness, he has a slow, benign smile which gives his countenance the amiability of a nice boy. There are few men or women who will not talk with him, and his friends are legion in every class of trades from forgers to bishops.

He moans and sighs a great deal and his conversation is always larded with quotations from classic literature. Given the opportunity, he will discourse for hours on such unrelated subjects as Latin hymns, the charm of puddings, and the ideal cat, or will talk interminably of rock gardens or Chinese nursery rhymes. He says he has no imagination but his curiosity is catholic in its scope, and he says of himself that: "I'm the kind of a fellow who will always ought to have been someone else."

Included among his personal phobias is a fondness for weak tea and sweets during his odd moments, although he is a gourmet and a connoisseur of wines. He has a disaffection for port, a dislike for chrysanthemums almost as great as his dislike for dahlias, and he would not shoot pheasants if he could. He has a hatred for walking, a hatred of crowds, and an abomination for crawling cars. He himself drives a big car with what his wife describes as "a lyric manner," a statement somewhat difficult to reconcile with the known fact that he invariably drives at a disintegrating speed like a maniac. This, in spite of the fact that he fervently maintains that no man drives more rationally than he.

While it is said of him that he has a larger mass of useless knowledge than any man in England, this, you may understand, is but one more of the many traits and mannerisms. The man himself is one of the great detectives of fiction, a man who can elucidate a crime with practical infallibility. From the mere observation of a trifle he has the ability to divine the character of a man, and he possesses the singular faculty for feeling other men's minds at work — a sixth sense, so to speak.

He is a practising physician and surgeon and when he first appeared on our horizons — away back in 1920 — he was conducting his father's practice in the suburb of Westhampton. Today, and throughout the intervening years, he has been the adviser and head consultant to the chief of the C.I.D., and on all matters per-

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taining to surgery, medicine, and kindred sciences he is hearkened to with great respect. It is said of him that his deductions are the result of pure reason, reasoning raised to the power of pure genius. Although his acquaintances will argue far to the contrary, he himself insists that he is not clever and is, indeed, but "the natural man."

He is a languid fellow and usually may be found asprawl on his back, whether in a chair, a sofa, or a bed. However, it has been remarked of him that when interested in a case he will do everything himself, and many will aver that while neither his figure nor his habits are formed for quick movement, few can dress so quickly as he or cover the ground faster on urgent occasions. As a matter of fact, so orderly a man is he that even his subconscious mind is orderly, as evidenced by the fact that he can order himself to awaken at a given moment, and do so.

He has many pet theories and convictions, one among them being that policemen are creatures whose chief function in life is to see that the stable door is locked after the horse is stolen. Another is that you never know what you are doing, and still another is that his mind is governed by caution, a thought not admitted by his friends because he invariably places himself at the central point of peril whenever the need for action arises.

Do you know this man? Well, a few final clues. His favorite expressions are: "Zeal, all zeal." "We are not amused." And: "My only aunt!"

Now if you are baffled by "Guess Who," you will find the solution below, printed upside down.

Solution

Of course you guessed it: Reggie Fortune — the hero of more than twenty volumes from the prolific pen of Henry Christopher Bailey, who has also given us the exploits and adventures of Mr. Joshua Clunk. Watch for a Reggie Fortune story next month — *The Yellow Slugs* — rated one of THE GOLDEN DOZEN — one of the twelve best detective short stories ever written, in the judgment of our panel of experts.

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THE SILVER QUARREL

by VINCENT CORNIER

So far as can be determined, the last male member of the ancient Agrayth family died in London in October 1920. This was Roy — Roylance Ellersby Agrayth, alias "Cotcher" Brown.

By the right of circumstance this man should have ended up as a portly squire, decently making his final exit at Agrayth Priory in Agraythdale, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Instead of that he died in a poor-law hospital side-ward.

He was picked up, unconscious, under the trees of King's Bench Walk, on the night of the eighth of October in that year. He was rushed to the hospital and found to be past all human aid — pneumonia, accelerated by exposure and hunger.

Toward the end he had a lot to say about those metal camels that bear their five-fold burdens as supports and decorations for the seats of the Victoria Embankment. He made his last laughters from the fact that spreading lotus flowers divide the teakwood rails of those fateful benches . . . the symbols of perpetual ease and loveliness in life, allotting the resting places of uttermost human misery.

Those Embankment seats, the lights of the Thames and remembrance of the cold and hungry autumnal nights, were fused in his delirious recollection with other matters. He talked about a gracious home and the wild old ruby valleys of the north. He also mentioned a table in that home — and the story of that table.

A Doctor Imeson listened very intently to these feverish statements made by "Cotcher" Brown. He also was a Yorkshireman. He knew all the district the dying man described. Particularly did he know that "Cotcher" Brown was not mere street-scour . . . but an Agrayth of Agraythdale, one of those ruddy-headed and devilish Agrayths whose deeds across the centuries had made proud history. He had recognized the man from the very beginning.

So Phineas Imeson, M.D., listened with all his ears. The Agrayth treasure, hidden during the Civil Wars of the mid-seventeenth century, was said to owe its security to the fact that no one had deciphered the clues to its whereabouts . . . and those were carved on that table of which "Cotcher" Brown so monotonously raved.

Here, to Imeson's certain knowledge, was the last of Agrayths of Agraythdale. In his failing brain was the truth about that reputedly enormous hoard. Hence Imeson paid

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more attention to "Cotcher" Brown than was either professional or usual. And his vigilance rewarded him.

When Roylance Agrayth had ceased to live, Doctor Imeson softly chuckled to himself and entered certain notes in a little book. He had been informed of all that was necessary. . . .

The treasure was still in existence. The clue to its hiding place *was* carved on that refectory table which stood in the hall of Agrayth Priory. That clue, in some almost uncanny way, Imeson had learned from his patient, was bound up with the date of the ninth of September in any one year — and that one day only.

If that day chanced to be overcast and sullen it was useless trying to probe the table's secret for another year. If it were brilliant and sunny, at three o'clock in the afternoon of that day the carved words had to be scanned. If then their secret could be determined, the hoarded wealth of Agrayth would be revealed. If not — *not.*

Now it occurred to Doctor Imeson that this was all very peculiar. It seemed well-nigh incredible that three centuries should have passed — three hundred separate and distinct opportunities — without the secret being resolved. But, being an arrogant type of fellow, he determined to try what he could to solve the riddle. Where the Agrayth family had failed, surely *he* might succeed. They had been fighters, not thinkers.

The only danger on Imeson's path to that success was indicated by Agrayth's talk about a "doom" that awaited anyone outside the actual Agrayth family who should stumble by chance or design on the secret. What this danger was Imeson had not been able to determine. . . . All he knew about it had come to a vague head in Agrayth's oft-repeated maunderings about "a life for a penny. . . ."

"A life for a penny," Agrayth had muttered to himself. "*Aye, yes* — just that! Someone else might find it . . . gold: a fortune . . . and in finding it, sell their lives . . . for a penny — a life for a penny." Then he choked in laughter through his fading hours. "Damn' queer that. A hundred-thousand quid just within one's grasp, and then — a pennyworth of — of eternal nothingness. . . ."

It was a thousand pities, thought Doctor Imeson, that "Cotcher" Brown had not been more explicit. He very much wanted to lay hands on that great hoard, but, being Phineas Imeson, did not relish any risk of losing his precious life.

However, that remained to the future. In the meantime a "Cotcher" Brown, vagrant and pauper, had to be certified as being no longer a unit in the mass of living humanity.

Several years later a certain Harley Street specialist, Sir Phineas Imeson, approached Mr. Barnabas Hildreth, an officer of the Political Intelligence — otherwise the Secret Service — with an unusual proposition.

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He had heard, he said, of some of the Black Monk's extraordinary successes in solving mysteries beyond the common sort. He, the great Sir Phineas, had a problem of that nature which required solution. Now if Mr. Barnabas Hildreth would extend the courtesy of his attention to the hearing of this problem, Sir Phineas would be grateful. . . . If, having heard it, Mr. Barnabas Hildreth would care to accept a private commission, Sir Phineas would be more than grateful: to the tune of a thousand guineas.

Well, Barnabas listened, then came to see me.

"Look here, Ingram, old chap," he said, "I want you to advise me in this. I don't care about this fellow's thousand quid, and I don't care for his general oiliness, nor his crafty expectations. . . . But I *do* like his mystery. It's got me all het up, as they say. . . . Now you get your ears on to this — and when I've told you the tale, answer me . . . does anything about it strike you as being fishy?"

He retailed to me much less than I have already recorded. At that stage in the mystery there were only the pristine elements of the table, the significance of the ninth of September, three o'clock in the afternoon, and the treasure of Agrayth Priory to be considered. All the remainder I have had necessarily to state somewhat out of its order.

I listened to the recital and smiled.

"Funny, isn't it; we make a trio of Yorkshire Tykes — Agrayth, Imeson, and me! Is that why you've decided I can help?"

"Yes. Imeson is a West Riding man, so are you. . . . You know that country. D'you think there's any truth in the Agrayth treasure talk?"

"I am absolutely certain it exists. There are records to prove that. But where it might lie and how its hiding-place connects up with that huge table is something beyond me."

" 'Huge table'?" he echoed. "Is it that?"

"I've seen it, if that'll help at all." My wits worked swiftly in recollection, and I managed to gather together a summary of sorts. "Agrayth Priory is a show place, Hildreth. Benedictine monks built it in the twelfth century as a kind of luxurious colony-headquarters among all the grimmer Cistercian abbeys in that part of the world. It was, and always has been, a treasure house in itself. The actual table that served the monks as a common board is something like ten yards in length and weighs, at least, three tons."

"*What?*"

"I'm not exaggerating, Hildreth. It's as big and heavy as a small barge, without that form, of course."

"Good Lord!" Hildreth was frankly astounded. "Never thought of it being anything like that."

"As a matter of fact, its top is nearly one foot thick. Its edges are gloriously carved. Oh, take my word for it, it's a table beyond anything you'll have ever seen before."

"*Um!* But to get back — doesn't

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Imeson's tale impress you as being rocky, somewhere?"

"Can't say that it does." I reconsidered all that had been said. "Agrayth Priory's in the market. Imeson says he's going to buy it. He tells you frankly he's prepared to invest in it sheerly with a view to recovering the treasure . . . what's wrong?"

The dark eyes of Hildreth began to glow in that peculiar light of fanaticism I have always found frightening. His thin face seemed paler and more settled in line. The cast of asceticism and hunger was on it; therefore he was determined on the course of another of his mysterious pieces of work.

"Nothing wrong," he replied, "except the feeling at the pit of my stomach which tells me Sir Phineas Imeson is several sorts of a treacherous swine . . . that he's going to use me as a lever in some devilry ——"

"What 'devilry' can there be in the simple proposition that you employ your peculiar talents in solving a treasure-riddle, for a change? Really, I think everything's put to you very fairly."

"Do you?" Again that sardonic glitter of laughter in those deep-set eyes. "I don't. . . . But I'll take on the job just to satisfy myself that my instincts are not going to fail me now, after serving me so faithfully through all these years."

"Aren't you rather thick-headed in assuming that?"

"I'm convinced, Ingram, that something of the nature of playing touch with death is behind all this hokery-pokery. Imeson knows that already. He's wanting me as a first-line defense. I'm to rake his chestnuts for him."

"Oh, *preposterous!*"

"Very well, we'll see . . . When will you be ready to start?"

"For the North, you mean?"

"I do! No excuse now. The ninth of September isn't so very far away and you can leave your blessed newspaper to look after itself for a week."

I argued and protested, but Hildreth had his way in the end. . . . No, not Hildreth. Let this be written down fairly. I *wanted* to see again, after many years, if Muriel Agrayth of Agrayth Priory was still as sweet and gracious as in those far-off days when she and I played together and rode and walked about the Priory lands. Hildreth had referred to me, because he knew I had been born in one of the Agrayth farmsteads, nearly half a century ago.

It was magnificent to me, that native heath. We reached the narrow valley in the green and twilight sweetness of an early September day and, within five minutes, I had forgotten twenty years of trouble and toil. The moor winds sang to me. The river shivered and sighed and laughed, as always it has done.

We motored over to Agrayth Priory from the narrow, wind-blown market town of Hatharen Heights. Five miles from station and town, the ancient place showed up like something faëry, yet sombre with the

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satanical airs of beetling age: Titania grown old and evil with it.

It was closed and tenantless. The last of the Agrayth family, Miss Muriel, we were told, had not lived in the house for five years. She had spent what remained of her slender resources in searching the world for her lost brother, Roylance. Only at this date, after the police had produced a shameful record of minor crime, was she convinced that her beloved Roy was dead — was to be identified with "Cotcher" Brown, the vagrant and petty thief who lay in a stoneless grave in London.

Most of the old furnishings of the place had been sold. One by one those rare pieces had gone to the markets, to provide Miss Muriel with the means of subsistence. She had taken up her residence in one of her cottages on the roadside half way to Hatharen Heights.

So we entered Agrayth Priory, as entering a tomb. The marvellous hall was still the same. Pinnacles and pilasters of alabaster, frets and tortuities of graven grey stone, showed all about. The low roof was pargeted with gilded and stearine-soaked plasters and the floor was silver and smooth with the rare sheen of age-worn brit-spar flags. With its dull oak, its warm cedar, its grey alabaster and its solemn honey-colored ceiling, that hall was a goblin haunt for beauty.

The mighty refectory table cut the space in two. It was fully six feet wide by thirty in length. My estimate of its weight, at three tons, could not have been far below the actual. It could have seated a hundred people.

"*Ah*," said Hildreth, and he touched the board, "so here's where the treasure lies concealed — *eh?*"

"'*Here*'; in the thick top of the table, do you mean?"

Very complacently the admirable Mr. Barnabas Hildreth nodded.

"Where else, Ingram? Hasn't it crossed your mind that this oak can be hollow, and that the hoard will more than likely be packed away inside?"

"And hasn't it struck you that hundreds of others have suspected the same thing, old man? Dash it all" — his face had grown sullen and petulant — "the top has been drilled and probed from underneath to a dangerous extent. I don't believe there's a single square foot of it that hasn't been sounded — and it's wood, nothing but solid wood. It's been subjected to X-rays, it's been photographed in ultra-violet light, it's been messed about by nearly everyone interested — and you can take it as gospel, no treasure is concealed *in* it."

That was the first time I ever saw Hildreth in a mean mood. He had been so magnificently certain of himself that this swift humbling made him rather petty. He sneered and shrugged his shoulders and stalked about like some callow ass who deserved a good kicking.

I yawned at last.

"As you said, the ninth of September is not so far away. What about it, Barnabas?"

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He stopped his parade and waved a protesting hand. He was looking at the tall and Gothic-arched lancet windows.

"Sitha lad," he mocked my native dialect, "dosta see owt abaht them winders what's noan soa reight es it meight be — *hey?*"

"I see nine lancet windows and an oriel," I stiffly told him. "No more, no less. Others have seen them, too."

"And I see nine windows." He rubbed his hands and color came back to his face. "Also the original glazings of those windows. That glass looks extraordinarily old to me."

Certainly that was correct. It was heavy in cast and built up in fine layers — monkish flint-glass, nearly seven hundred years old.

"It varies a lot in color, doesn't it?" he went on.

I agreed that it did so. . . .

Still nervously flickering his hands, he looked from the lancets to the ornamentation above them. Hollow-mouthed gargoyles ended the coigns of the stone archings in which the glazings were set. From these grinning masks pillars went down to heavy pediments set on the stone floor.

Now he stepped back to the table. He went on his knees and examined the carvings of its edge. And he kept up a slow soft whistling all the while.

The Benedictines were not of the most stringent orders of monastic life. They had been artists and wine makers and lovers of metals and woods and furs and all fabrics. Where the dour Cistercian thought of sheep and mining and an ashen cross on which to die at the end, the Benedictine gloated over richly-ornamented vellums, exquisitely-detailed scripts and the voluptuous fullness of board and bed.

Hence the carvings of the table were florid and semi-pagan in their whole display. Cut *intaglio* into the length of thick oak was the representation of a mythical woodland scene. Sprites and hobgoblins sported about fantastic trees. All birds and beasts, with a few exceptions, had jolly human heads . . . and nymphs and dryads hovered about the couch whereon a huge and bearded man — apparently Sylvanus, the god of woodlands — had been interrupted in his rest.

Interrupted — annoyed — aroused: he was depicted as shaking his fist at a hooting owl and a crouching night-jar. On a "label" issuing from his thick lips were engraved the words "*Tu Quoque*". . . .

Now this was all a graven fantasy of the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Later hands had again carved on the wood. These had cut words on the top of the table, marring its spacious plane to record, on the model of a Spenserian stanza, a verse. The lines described the monkish picture of the table edged in ornate beauty:

"Deepe yn the woode the hullet builds her nest,
And shriekynge oft through brake and arrass'd glayde
Transmews the sweet nighte's still, yn hungry quest,

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To clamour. Then the churr, strange bristl'd jayde,
Relique of earth's birth, yn breath dimm'd amber drest,
Flynges from her yron tongue, Hamadryade,
Gaunt to the lush meadows mellowéd rest
Yn glee malitious and with wanton rayde
On old Sylvanus, hys rustiek peace yn yvied shayde."

Barnabas Hildreth made a note of the verse, grinned, stroked the woodwork on which it was displayed, and, still whistling, started to go to the door.

"I think," he commented, "the hour of three o'clock — or four o'clock by the reckoning of summer time — of the afternoon of the day after tomorrow ought to be exciting for Sir Phineas Imeson."

"Oh, ought it?"

"I think so, I really think so." And Hildreth, whistling again, sauntered out to our car.

I had sufficient knowledge of Hildreth to determine that he had not solved the mystery of the Agrayth treasure. Had he done so he would have been silent and whimsically smiling. Despite his cock-a-hoop demeanor I sensed his bewilderment. Something in this business was disturbing him very strangely.

But I said nothing. It was not the time . . . I left him to his thoughts and kept my mind on mine. And those, in this plain tale of olden mystery, might not interest. Excepting that, I only state that Miss Muriel Agrayth had not changed much within the years. She had still the patient mien and the luminous sapphire eyes of the girl with whom I had romped and roved among the moors and our woodlands.

When the car returned to Hatharen Heights we had dinner at our inn. After that Barnabas Hildreth set off to meet Sir Phineas Imeson, who was arriving by the eight-thirty train — I went along the wayside to see Miss Muriel Agrayth in her cottage.

Between that night and Tuesday, the ninth, Phineas Imeson and Barnabas Hildreth kept closely together.

But, on the night of the eighth, Barnabas came to me and told me, quietly, he thought he had succeeded in unravelling the mystery of the hidden hoard.

"At any rate, we'll know tomorrow afternoon," he said. "*And*" — his voice was curiously solemn — "if I'm alive tomorrow night, I'll be a lucky fellow."

"Oh, nonsense, Barnabas!"

" 'A life for a penny,' Ingram: don't forget what the dying 'Cotcher' Brown said." He looked up warily. "By the way, has Miss Agrayth said anything to you about that?"

"No. Not a word. I've told you all she knows — that the treasure exists and that the verse on the table-top gives clue to its hiding place. She has a suspicion that something else *is* mixed up in the funny business, but only the eldest sons, the heirs, of the family have been told what precisely that is."

"I see; a secret handed down for generations — *eh?*"

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"Just so. Roylance Agrayth took it to his grave."

After a while Barnabas Hildreth observed something about "a queer gang, the whole lot of those Agrayths," and then peacefully lay back in his chair and closed his eyes. In two minutes he was sound asleep.

On Tuesday afternoon, Hildreth, Sir Phineas Imeson and myself stood in the hall of Agrayth Priory smoking and talking. The sun streamed through the nine lancet windows and bathed the table in an effulgent light. It picked out every detail of the carved woodwork and made the whimsy of rhyming words stand out boldly, in variously colored glowings.

Hildreth threw away his cigarette as four o'clock drew near. Without a word to us, he turned on his heel and went outside. I glimpsed him in the grounds beyond the nine tall windows.

Five minutes to four o'clock . . . from one glazing to the other Hildreth went. His face, oddly distorted by the thick glass, was full of exultation. I could see his lips moving and his hands flickering. One window after another — all in less than two minutes — were visited. He seemed intent on counting up those diamond-shaped panes holding the clearest glass.

Dead on the hour he approached the table.

The slowly-moving sunlight was still catching the carven words in luminous webs. Slowly moving — ever so slowly moving — a mosaic of marvellous colors patterned the vast Benedictine board.

Then Hildreth gasped and pointed.

" 'In breath-dimmed amber drest,' " he quoted. "*Quick* — d'you see . . . *do you see?*" He touched here and there among the words. "*See*, these bluish and yellowish patches have got hold of something; dead on the hour. . . . Read what's marked out."

In nine eerie plates of amber light I saw a distinct pattern formed. Certain of the panes in the leaded lancets, clearer than their fellows, were allowing a wavering design of sunlight to have its being. In these colors were outlined these words:

"*Deepe yn the woode . . . quest . . . On old Sylvanus his . . . gaunt . . . rest . . . Then the churr . . . her yron tongue . . . relique . . . transmews . . .*"

"Now you've got it" — the speeding of time had already sent the amber shapes gliding over other words . . . "on the ecclesiastical 'ninth hour,' exactly, of the ninth day of the ninth month of any one year, those gravings covered by a yellowish glow provide the clue. Remember the state — the exact state — can occur only *once* in a year. Here we've seen those words. They make sense."

"They certainly appear to hold a message," I blurted. "But that's about all. '*Deepe yn the woode, quest*' brings us back to the supposition that the treasure's in the board. And tests have proved it isn't."

Sir Phineas Ingram was silent. He wanted to preserve his dignity, but

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was finding the task almost impossible. The look of utter cupidity which had stiffened his pale face made me sick. Hildreth only grinned at it.

"There's far more in that message, Ingram, if only you'll think straight," he rapped. "For instance" — he was moving round the table intent on the pagan woodland scene — "we've got to find the gaunt of old Sylvanus and the night-jar's iron tongue."

Puzzled, he scratched his head.

"Damned if he's wearing gloves," he muttered, "and precious little of anything else, for the matter of that." Sir Phineas made a cackle of laughter that hit me like a wire. "*Gaunt — gaunt* — ah, that can be it! A challenge, not a glove. . . . *Tu Quoque;* 'same to you and many of 'em' . . . That'll be it!"

He paused and made up his mind with care. At last he stated:

"When pressure is applied to that label, *Tu Quoque*, and to the tongue of the churr, we ought to see something worthwhile. They'll be stiff and all that, but a poker ought to do the trick."

Sir Phineas went one better. He grabbed a loose bar out of the long cradle of the fireplace. Now he had foregone all pretense. We saw him exactly as he was: a gain-mad, covetous and lusting man.

Grunting something unintelligible, he pushed us to one side and bent and thrust the bar on the "label" issuing from Sylvanus' protesting lips. A distinct click was heard, and the tiny lozenge sank into the oak. . . . He crashed the steel on the thin tongue of the night-jar. . . .

There was a vast roaring, a tremor of the stone-flagged floor, a scream and an iridescent uprising of fine dust. With it came a wet and earthy breath and a smell of mouldering and musk and the lemon-keen scent of wet old metal.

The table shuddered and the windows rattled, for all their strength and stone . . . and the hiding-place of the Agrayth treasure was discovered.

Exactly between the two central boles of the table a cavity had appeared. A flooring flag had disappeared into the earth like a lift down a shaft. I glanced at Hildreth and gaped.

Some peculiar aphasia had blotted out all my thoughts except those concentrated on the success of the experiment. I had not seen that Sir Phineas Imeson had been stricken down in the very moment of his victory — but now, seeing Hildreth, I also saw the doctor. He was huddled across the Benedictine table with a wound like the gape of a Negro's lips laid right across the base of his skull. A silvery shuttle of some kind was on the oak beside him.

Hildreth called to me:

"For God's sake, Ingram, don't stand there like something idiotic! We've got to get him out of here — and sharp! I — I think he's about finished."

"Wh — what's happened?"

Angrily Hildreth pointed to a

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gargoyle that topped a pillar behind my back. I looked up at it . . . it was a devil-eared thing, bald and gap-mouthed. Its leer had a sentience that was revolting.

"That was the trick. Something shot out of that gargoyle's throat and mouth" — he touched the bloody silver shuttle — "and nearly had his head off." Even in the urgent moments he could not stand back from the dispassionate aspects of the case. "Looks to me like a crossbow quarrel . . . a silver dart."

I grunted and went over to do what I could for the moaning and unconscious Imeson. My knowledge of medicine is practically *nil;* Hildreth's, that of a good practitioner, but between his brain and my more careful hands, we contrived to patch Imeson in such a way as to preserve his life.

At least, the hospital authorities said as much when, almost an hour later, we had him some fifteen miles away under expert care. The base of the skull was fractured, and such a jolt had been delivered to his spine as almost to part the Atlas and Axis bones . . . the doom of judicial hanging.

Three days elapsed before we finally disposed of all the secrets of Agrayth Priory. And, disposed, we could not forbear from laughing at the extreme simplicity of all that had baffled across the centuries.

The hole beneath the table had been made for a hiding-place for priests, not treasure. The windows and the ornate stanza were bound together by the patient intelligence of timeless days — not hastily conceived in a time of civil war. Hildreth reckoned that ten years must have been necessary to complete all the magnificent arrangement.

First the priest-hole; from it a subterranean alleyway leading under four or five of the floor-stones to a thick wall; in this wall another tall chamber . . . and a spy-hole that opened through the gargoyle's leering mouth. A man in hiding could move from his cell to the chamber at any time and, from his peep-hole, keep the whole of the hall under gaze.

But, in the hiding of the treasure in the priest-hole proper, the Agrayth of 1642 had conceived a deadly use for this second room in the wall. Having stacked his wealth under the table, he had arranged a kind of see-saw mechanism along the subterranean way. By a device similar to the old-fashioned sneck latch one finds on cottage doors, he had been able to leave a trap to be sprung.

A cross-bow with a strong and finely-tempered Toledo spring had been fixed in such a way as to fire its dart out of the mouth of the gargoyle. That dart — that "quarrel" — or, in the vernacular of mediaeval days, that "*penny*" — was aimed to strike anyone who tampered with the table, not aware of the whole of the secrets it concealed.

When Imeson operated the latches concealed in the table-top, the flagstones (which had been secured by

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rods passing up through the boles of the table, as pencils pushed through cotton reels) by their own weight descended. In falling they struck the "see-saw" . . . up went the other end of that, lifting the sneck from the spring of the rigidly-held cross-bow. The sneck lifted, the spring straightened — and the silver quarrel sped with half the velocity of a modern bullet to do its deadly work.

"And, Ingram," Hildreth told me at the end, "when you bear in mind that a cross-bow quarrel could drill a man straight through the body at a hundred yards, kill a stag at four hundred paces — and that the secret of a Toledo sword or spring temper essentially lay in the fact that neither age nor circumstance could affect it — you see what Sir Phineas missed. He'll live to thank his lucky stars that he only got a glancing blow instead of a straight bolt."

But, I am afraid, I was no longer interested in the fate of the avaricious Sir Phineas. I kept in mind the fact that he had not, as yet, completed his purchase of Agrayth Priory . . . and that my lady Muriel Agrayth lived in a cottage on the wayside down the valley, in poverty.

Something red hung over my recollection of those velvets and damascened armorings and jewels and books and gold and silver plate we had taken from a horse-hide-covered chest found on a shelf in the priest-hole. I seethed to think all this might go to Phineas Imeson.

"Do — do you believe," I gasped at last, "that the coroner, after he's held inquest on the treasure-trove, will grant Sir Phineas Imeson that hoard — after the Crown has taken its share?"

Hildreth's dark eyes twinkled and he pushed back his black hair.

"My dear good worrying soul," he blandly remarked, "I'm afraid you are not learned in the law. There is" — and he spread his delicate hands out wide — "a vast difference between a *heritage* passing after many years to a descendant of the original devisee and a casual and forgotten treasure found in the earth. Neither the Crown nor Sir Phineas can touch one pennyworth of that stuff. It belongs in its entirety to Miss Muriel Agrayth, of Agrayth Priory in Agraythdale."

"You — you are *sure?*"

Hildreth slowly nodded his head.

"Forgive me for the impertinence," he very gently said, "but I knew how much you have remembered of other days, and Muriel Agrayth. I did not accept this case to benefit Sir Phineas Imeson, but to secure to the very dear friend of my only friend" — I looked away from his burning eyes — "some small peacefulness that I knew it was possible for my peculiar talents to achieve."

. . . And this from the "Black Monk," whose deadly acumen and dispassionate skill frightened even the Secret Service mandarins who employed him from Whitehall! As I have asked before — how can one sum up a Hildreth?

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: JOHN D. MACDONALD

Although John D. MacDonald writes for such high-bracket magazines as "Collier's" and "Cosmopolitan," this is his first appearance in EQMM. "The Homesick Buick" (love that title!) was written especially for EQMM's 1949 Contest — and are we glad we had first crack at it! If a tale of pure detection and impure crime could, by any stretch of the imagination, be called a delightful story, this is it.

We simply cannot resist quoting from the author's letter about his background as a writer. Mr. MacDonald informed us that "at any grade in school I could have been voted the student least likely to write any kind of story. After graduating from the Harvard School of Business, I was all set, according to all the signs and portents, to parlay my academic wealth into a Brooks suit and an executive manner. But after two years of teetering on various lower rungs of the ladder, the war came along, and I spent nearly six months memorizing obscure paragraphs of the ARs, and as a member of a non-glamorous branch of the OSS, protecting visiting specialists from the intricacies of Far Eastern plumbing. While overseas I wrote a story, and darned if my wife Dorothy didn't sell the thing!

"The Harvard Business School had suggested picking a business without too much overhead, and writing seemed to be the optimum example. Since the war we have lived by the pen, abandoning the sword . . .

"I used to read EQMM for pleasure. Those days are gone. Every time a new issue comes, I am caught up in a horrid mess of envy and despair . . . Now, having wedged my way into EQMM, maybe I can start reading for pleasure again.

"The idea for 'The Homesick Buick' struck me while on a trip through Texas. The first two attempts at it were from the viewpoints of individual characters. The third try, from the omnipotent viewpoint, seemed to fit best [Editors' comment: We agree most heartily!]."

Mr. MacDonald went on to say that "no acceptance, at this point, could have given me more satisfaction and pleasure." But shifting the viewpoint again, that satisfaction and pleasure is entirely ours, Mr. MacDonald, acting as middlemen between you and the readers of EQMM.

"The Homesick Buick" is one of the 13 prize-winning stories which will make up THE QUEEN'S AWARDS: FIFTH SERIES, *to be published by Little, Brown & Company this coming October.*

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THE HOMESICK BUICK

by JOHN D. MacDONALD

TO GET to Leeman, Texas, you go southwest from Beaumont on Route 90 for approximately thirty miles and then turn right on a two-lane concrete farm road. Five minutes from the time you turn, you will reach Leeman. The main part of town is six lanes wide and five blocks long. If the hand of a careless giant should remove the six gas stations, the two theaters, Willows' Hardware Store, the Leeman National Bank, the two big air-conditioned five-and-dimes, the Sears store, four cafés, Rightsinger's dress shop, and The Leeman House, a twenty-room hotel, there would be very little left except the supermarket and four assorted drug stores.

On October 3rd, 1949, a Mr. Stanley Woods arrived by bus and carried his suitcase over to The Leeman House. In Leeman there is no social distinction of bus, train, or plane, since Leeman has neither airport facilities nor railroad station.

On all those who were questioned later, Mr. Stanley Woods seemed to have made very little impression. They all spoke of kind of a medium-size fella in his thirties, or it might be his forties. No, he wasn't fat, but he wasn't thin either. Blue eyes? Could be brown. Wore a gray suit, I think. Can't remember whether his glasses had rims or not. If they did have rims, they were probably gold.

But all were agreed that Mr. Stanley Woods radiated quiet confidence and the smell of money. According to the cards that were collected here and there, Mr. Woods represented the Groston Precision Tool Company of Atlanta, Georgia. He had deposited in the Leeman National a certified check for twelve hundred dollars and the bank had made the routine check of looking up the credit standing of Groston. It was Dun & Bradstreet double-A, but, of course, the company explained later that they had never heard of Mr. Stanley Woods. Nor could the fake calling cards be traced. They were of a type of paper and type face which could be duplicated sixty or a hundred times in every big city in the country.

Mr. Woods' story, which all agreed on, was that he was ". . . nosing around to find a good location for a small plant. Decentralization, you know. No, we don't want it right in town."

He rented Tod Bishner's car during the day. Tod works at the Shell station on the corner of Beaumont and Lone Star Streets and doesn't have any use for his Plymouth sedan during the day. Mr. Woods drove around all the roads leading out of town and, of course, real estate prices

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were jacked to a considerable degree during his stay.

Mr. Stanley Woods left Leeman rather suddenly on the morning of October 17th under unusual circumstances.

The first person to note a certain oddness was Miss Trilla Price on the switchboard at the phone company. Her local calls were all right but she couldn't place Charley Anderson's call to Houston, nor, when she tried, could she raise Beaumont. Charley was upset because he wanted to wangle an invitation to go visit his sister over the coming weekend.

That was at five minutes of nine. It was probably at the same time that a car with two men in it parked on Beaumont Street, diagonally across from the bank, and one of the two men lifted the hood and began to fiddle with the electrical system.

Nobody agrees from what direction the Buick came into town. There was a man and a girl in it and they parked near the drug store. No one seems to know where the third car parked, or even what kind of car it was.

The girl and the man got out of the Buick slowly, just as Stanley Woods came down the street from the hotel.

In Leeman the bank is open on weekdays from nine until two. And so, at nine o'clock, C. F. Hethridge, who is, or was, the chief teller, raised the green shades on the inside of the bank doors and unlocked the doors. He greeted Mr. Woods, who went on over to the high counter at the east wall and began to ponder over his check book.

At this point, out on the street, a very peculiar thing happened. One of the two men in the first car strolled casually over and stood beside the Buick. The other man started the motor of the first car, drove down the street, and made a wide U-turn to swing in and park behind the Buick.

The girl and the man had gone over to Bob Kimball's window. Bob is second teller, and the only thing he can remember about the girl is that she was blonde and a little hard-looking around the mouth, and that she wore a great big alligator shoulder-bag. The man with her made no impression on Bob at all, except that Bob thinks the man was on the heavy side.

Old Rod Harrigan, the bank guard, was standing beside the front door, yawning, and picking his teeth with a broken match.

At this point C. F. Hethridge heard the buzzer on the big time-vault and went over and swung the door wide and went in to get the money for the cages. He was out almost immediately, carrying Bob's tray over to him. The girl was saying something about cashing a check and Bob had asked her for identification. She had opened the big shoulder-bag as her escort strolled over to the guard. At the same moment the girl pulled out a small vicious-looking revolver and aimed it between Bob's eyes, her escort sapped Old Rod

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Harrigan with such gusto that it was four that same afternoon before he came out of it enough to talk. And then, of course, he knew nothing.

C. F. Hethridge bolted for the vault and Bob, wondering whether he should step on the alarm, looked over the girl's shoulder just in time to see Stanley Woods aim carefully and bring Hethridge down with a slug through the head, catching him on the fly, so to speak.

Bob says that things were pretty confusing and that the sight of Hethridge dying so suddenly sort of took the heart out of him. Anyway, there was a third car and it contained three men, two of them equipped with empty black-leather suitcases. They went into the vault, acting as though they had been all through the bank fifty times. They stepped over Hethridge on the way in, and on the way out again.

About the only cash they overlooked was the cash right in front of Bob, in his teller's drawer.

As they all broke for the door, Bob dropped and pressed the alarm button. He said later that he held his hands over his eyes, though what good that would do him, he couldn't say.

Henry Willows is the real hero. He was fuddying around in his hardware store when he heard the alarm. With a reaction-time remarkable in a man close to seventy, he took a little twenty-two rifle, slapped a clip into it, trotted to his store door, and quickly analyzed the situation. He saw Mr. Woods, whom he recognized, plus three strangers and a blonde woman coming out of the bank pretty fast. Three cars were lined up, each one with a driver. Two of the men coming out of the bank carried heavy suitcases. Henry leveled on the driver of the lead car, the Buick, and shot him in the left temple, killing him outright. The man slumped over the wheel, his body resting against the horn ring, which, of course, added its blare to the clanging of the bank alarm.

At that point a slug, later identified as having come from a Smith & Wesson Police Positive, smashed a neat hole in Henry's plate-glass store window, radiating cracks in all directions. Henry ducked, and by the time he got ready to take a second shot, the two other cars were gone. The Buick was still there. He saw Bob run out of the bank, and later on he told his wife that he had his finger on the trigger and his sights lined up before it came to him that it was Bob Kimball.

It was agreed that the two cars headed out toward Route 90 and, within two minutes, Hod Abrams and Lefty Quinn had roared out of town in the same direction in the only police car. They were followed by belligerent amateurs to whom Henry Willows had doled out firearms. But on the edge of town all cars ran into an odd obstacle. The road was liberally sprinkled with metal objects shaped exactly like the jacks that little girls pick up when they bounce

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a ball, except they were four times normal size and all the points were sharpened. No matter how a tire hit one, it was certain to be punctured.

The police car swerved to a screaming stop, nearly tipping over. The Stein twins, boys of nineteen, managed to avoid the jacks in their souped-up heap until they were hitting eighty. When they finally hit one, the heap rolled over an estimated ten times, killing the twins outright.

So that made four dead. Hethridge, the Stein twins, and one unidentified bank robber.

Nobody wanted to touch the robber, and he stayed right where he was until the battery almost ran down and the horn squawked into silence. Hod Abrams commandeered a car, and he and Lefty rode back into town and took charge. They couldn't get word out by phone and within a very short time they found that some sharpshooter with a highpowered rifle had gone to work on the towers of local station WLEE and had put the station out of business.

Thus, by the time the Texas Rangers were alerted and ready to set up road blocks, indecision and confusion had permitted an entire hour to pass.

The Houston office of the FBI assigned a detail of men to the case and, from the Washington headquarters, two bank-robbery experts were dispatched by plane to Beaumont. Reporters came from Houston and Beaumont and the two national press services, and Leeman found itself on the front pages all over the country because the planning behind the job seemed to fascinate the average joe.

Mr. Woods left town on that particular Thursday morning. The FBI from Houston was there by noon, and the Washington contingent arrived late Friday. Everyone was very confident. There was a corpse and a car to work on. These would certainly provide the necessary clues to indicate which outfit had pulled the job, even though the method of the robbery did not point to any particular group whose habits were known.

Investigation headquarters were set up in the local police station and Hod and Lefty, very important in the beginning, had to stand around outside trying to look as though they knew what was going on.

Hethridge, who had been a cold, reserved, unpopular man, had, within twenty-four hours, fifty stories invented about his human kindness and generosity. The Stein twins, heretofore considered to be trash who would be better off in prison, suddenly became proper sons of old Texas.

Special Agent Randolph A. Sternweister who, fifteen years before, had found a law office to be a dull place, was in charge of the case, being the senior of the two experts who had flown down from Washington. He was forty-one years old, a chain smoker, a chubby man with incon-

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gruous hollow cheeks and hair of a shade of gray which his wife, Claire, tells him is distinguished.

The corpse was the first clue. Age between thirty and thirty-two. Brown hair, thinning on top. Good teeth, with only four small cavities, two of them filled. Height, five foot eight and a quarter, weight a hundred and forty-eight. No distinguishing scars or tattoos. X-ray plates showed that the right arm had been fractured years before. His clothes were neither new nor old. The suit had been purchased in Chicago. The shirt, underwear, socks, and shoes were all national brands, in the medium-price range. In his pockets they found an almost full pack of cigarettes, a battered Zippo lighter, three fives and a one in a cheap, trick billclip, eighty-five cents in change, a book of matches advertising a nationally known laxative, a white bone button, two wooden kitchen matches with blue and white heads, and a penciled map, on cheap notebook paper, of the main drag of Leeman — with no indication as to escape route. His fingerprint classification was teletyped to the Central Bureau files and the answer came back that there was no record of him. It was at this point that fellow workers noted that Mr. Sternweister became a shade irritable.

The next search of the corpse was more minute. No specific occupational callouses were found on his hands. The absence of laundry marks indicated that his linen, if it had been sent out, had been cleaned by a neighborhood laundress. Since Willows had used a 22 hollow-point, the hydraulic pressure on the brain fluids had caused the eyes of Mr. X to bulge in a disconcerting fashion. A local undertaker, experienced in the damage caused by the average Texas automobile accident, replaced the bulging eyeballs and smoothed out the expression for a series of pictures which were sent to many points. The Chicago office reported that the clothing store which had sold the suit was large and that the daily traffic was such that no clerk could identify the customer from the picture; nor was the youngish man known to the Chicago police.

Fingernail scrapings were put in a labeled glassine envelope, as well as the dust vacuumed from pants cuffs and other portions of the clothing likely to collect dust. The excellent lab in Houston reported back that the dust and scrapings were negative to the extent that the man could not be tied down to any particular locality.

In the meantime the Buick had been the object of equal scrutiny. The outside was a mass of prints from the citizens of Leeman who had peered morbidly in at the man leaning against the horn ring. The plates were Mississippi license plates and, in checking with the Bureau of Motor Vehicle Registration, it was found that the plates had been issued for a 1949 Mercury convertible which had been almost totally de-

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stroyed in a head-on collision in June, 1949. The motor number and serial number of the Buick were checked against central records and it was discovered that the Buick was one which had disappeared from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, on the 5th of July, 1949. The insurance company, having already replaced the vehicle, was anxious to take possession of the stolen car.

Pictures of Mr. X, relayed to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and to myriad points in Mississippi, drew a large blank. In the meantime a careful dusting of the car had brought out six prints, all different. Two of them turned out to be on record. The first was on record through the cross-classification of Army prints. The man in question was found working in a gas station in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He had a very difficult two hours until a bright police officer had him demonstrate his procedure for brushing out the front of a car. Ex-Sergeant Golden braced his left hand against the dashboard in almost the precise place where the print had been found. He was given a picture of Mr. X to study. By that time he was so thoroughly annoyed at the forces of law and order that it was impossible to ascertain whether or not he had ever seen the man in question. But due to the apparent freshness of the print it was established — a reasonable assumption — that the gangsters had driven into Texas from the East.

The second print on record was an old print, visible when dust was carefully blown off the braces under the dismantled front seat. It belonged to a garage mechanic in Chapel Hill who once had a small misunderstanding with the forces of law and order and who was able to prove, through the garage work orders, that he had repaired the front seat mechanism when it had jammed in April, 1949.

The samples of road dirt and dust taken from the fender wells and the frame members proved nothing. The dust was proved, spectroscopically, to be from deep in the heart of Texas, and the valid assumption, after checking old weather reports, was that the car had come through some brisk thunderstorms en route.

Butts in the ashtray of the car showed that either two women, or one woman with two brands of lipstick, had ridden recently as a passenger. Both brands of lipstick were of shades which would go with a fair-complexioned blonde, and both brands were available in Woolworths, Kress, Kresge, Walgreens — in fact, in every chain outfit of any importance.

One large crumb of stale whole-wheat bread was found on the floor mat, and even Sternweister could make little of that, despite the fact that the lab was able to report that the bread had been eaten in conjunction with liverwurst.

Attention was given to the oversized jacks which had so neatly punctured the tires. An ex-OSS officer

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reported that similar items had been scattered on enemy roads in Burma during the late war and, after examining the samples, he stated confidently that the OSS merchandise had been better made. A competent machinist looked them over and stated with assurance that they had been made by cutting eighth-inch rod into short lengths, grinding them on a wheel, putting them in a jig, and spot-welding them. He said that the maker did not do much of a job on either the grinding or the welding, and that the jig itself was a little out of line. An analysis of the steel showed that it was a Jones & Laughlin product that could be bought in quantity at any wholesaler and in a great many hardware stores.

The auditors, after a careful examination of the situation at the bank, reported that the sum of exactly $94,725 had disappeared. They recommended that the balance remaining in Stanley Woods' account of $982.80 be considered as forfeited, thus reducing the loss to $93,742.20. The good citizens of Leeman preferred to think that Stanley had withdrawn his account.

Every person who had a glimpse of the gang was cross-examined. Sternweister was appalled at the difficulty involved in even establishing how many there had been. Woods, the blonde, and the stocky citizen were definite. And then there were two with suitcases — generally agreed upon. Total, so far — five. The big question was whether each car had a driver waiting. Some said no — that the last car in line had been empty. Willows insisted angrily that there had been a driver behind each wheel. Sternweister at last settled for a total of eight, seven of whom escaped.

No one had taken down a single license number. But it was positively established that the other two cars had been either two- or four-door sedans in dark blue, black, green, or maroon, and that they had been either Buicks, Nashes, Oldsmobiles, Chryslers, Pontiacs, or Packards — or maybe Hudsons. And one lone woman held out for convertible Cadillacs. For each person that insisted that they had Mississippi registration, there was one equally insistent on Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. And one old lady said that she guessed she knew a California plate when she saw one.

On Saturday morning, nine days after the sudden blow to the FDIC, Randolph Sternweister paced back and forth in his suite at the hotel, which he shared with the number two man from the Washington end, one Buckley Weed. Weed was reading through the transcripts of the testimony of the witnesses, in vain hope of finding something to which insufficient importance had been given. Weed, though lean, a bit stooped, and only thirty-one, had, through osmosis, acquired most of the personal mannerisms of his superior. Sternweister had noticed this and for the past year had been on the

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verge of mentioning it. As Weed had acquired Sternweister's habit of lighting one cigarette off the last half-inch of the preceeding one, any room in which the two of them remained for more than an hour took on the look and smell of any hotel room after a Legion convention.

"Nothing," Sternweister said. "Not one censored, unmentionable, unprintable, unspeakable thing! My God, if I ever want to kill anybody, I'll do it in the Pennsy Station at five fifteen.

"The Bureau has cracked cases when the only thing it had to go on was a human hair or a milligram of dust. My God, we've got a whole automobile that weighs nearly two tons, and a whole corpse! They'll think we're down here learning to rope calves. You know what?"

"What, Ran?"

"I think this was done by a bunch of amateurs. There ought to be a law restricting the practice of crime to professionals. A bunch of wise amateurs. And you can bet your loudest argyles, my boy, that they established identity, hideout, the works, before they knocked off that vault. Right now, blast their souls, they're being seven average citizens in some average community, making no splash with that ninety-four grand. People didn't used to move around so much. Since the war they've been migrating all over the place. Strangers don't stick out like sore thumbs any more. See anything in those transcripts?"

"Nothing."

"Then stop rattling paper. I can't think. Since a week ago Thursday fifty-one stolen cars have been recovered in the South and Southwest. And we don't know which two, if any belonged to this mob. We don't even know which route they took away from here. Believe it or not — nobody saw 'em!"

As the two specialists stared bleakly at each other, a young man of fourteen named Pink Dee was sidling inconspicuously through the shadows in the rear of Louie's Garage. (Tow car service — open 24 hrs.) Pink was considered to have been the least beautiful baby, the most unprepossessing child, in Leeman, and he gave frank promise of growing up to be a rather coarse joke on the entire human race. Born with a milk-blue skin, dead white hair, little reddish weak eyes, pipe-cleaner bones, narrow forehead, no chin, beaver teeth, a voice like an unoiled hinge, nature had made the usual compensation. His reaction-time was exceptional. Plenty of more rugged and more normal children had found out that Pink Dee could hit you by the time you had the word out of your mouth. The blow came from an outsize, knobbly fist at the end of a long thin arm, and he swung it with all the abandon of a bag of rocks on the end of a rope. The second important item about Pink Dee came to light when the Leeman School System started giving IQs. Pink's was higher than

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they were willing to admit the first time, as it did not seem proper that the only genius in Leeman should be old Homer Dee's only son. Pink caught on, and the second time he was rated he got it down into the cretin class. The third rating was ninety-nine and everybody seemed happy with that.

At fourteen Pink was six foot tall and weighed a hundred and twenty pounds. He peered at the world through heavy lenses and maintained, in the back room of his home on Fountain Street, myriad items of apparatus, some made, some purchased. There he investigated certain electrical and magnetic phenomena, having tired of building radios, and carried on a fairly virulent correspondence on the quantum theory with a Cal Tech professor who was under the impression that he was arguing with someone of more mature years.

Dressed in his khakis, the uniform of Texas, Pink moved through the shadows, inserted the key he had filched into the Buick door, and then into the ignition lock. He turned it on in order to activate the electrical gimmicks, and then turned on the car radio. As soon as it warmed up he pushed the selective buttons, carefully noting the dial. When he had the readings he tuned it to WLEE to check the accuracy of the dial. When WLEE roared into a farm report, Louie appeared and dragged Pink out by the thin scruff of his neck.

"What the hell?" Louie said.

Being unable to think of any adequate explanation, Pink wriggled away and loped out.

Pink's next stop was WLEE, where he was well known. He found the manual he wanted and spent the next twenty minutes with it.

Having been subjected to a certain amount of sarcasm from both Sternweister and Weed, Hod Abrams and Lefty Quinn were in no mood for the approach Pink Dee used.

"I demand to see the FBI," Pink said firmly, the effect spoiled a bit by the fact that his voice change was so recent that the final syllable was a reversion to his childhood squeaky-hinge voice.

"He demands," Hod said to Lefty.

"Go away, Pink," Lefty growled, "before I stomp on your glasses."

"I am a citizen who wishes to speak to a member of a Federal agency," Pink said with dignity.

"A citizen, maybe. A taxpayer, no. You give me trouble, kid, and I'm going to warm your pants right here in this lobby."

Maybe the potential indignity did it. Pink darted for the stairs leading up from the lobby. Hod went roaring up the stairs after him and Lefty grabbed the elevator. They both snared him outside Sternweister's suite and found that they had a job on their hands. Pink bucked and contorted like a picnic on which a hornet's nest has just fallen.

The door to the suite opened and both Sternweister and Weed glared out, their mouths open.

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"Just . . . just a fresh . . . kid," Hod Abrams panted.

"I know where the crooks are!" Pink screamed.

"He's nuts," Lefty yelled.

"Wait a minute," Randolph Sternweister ordered sharply. They stopped dragging Pink but still clung to him. "I admit he doesn't look as though he knew his way home, but you can't tell. You two wait outside. Come in here, young man."

Pink marched erectly into the suite, selected the most comfortable chair, and sank into it, looking smug.

"Where are they?"

"Well, I don't know exactly . . ."

"Outside!" Weed said with a thumb motion.

". . . but I know how to find out."

"Oh, you know how to find out, eh? Keep talking. I haven't laughed in nine days," Sternweister said.

"Oh, I had to do a little checking first," Pink said in a lofty manner. "I stole the key to the Buick and got into it to test something."

"Kid, experts have been over that car, half-inch by half-inch."

"Please don't interrupt me, sir. And don't take that attitude. Because, if it turns out I have something, and I know I have, you're going to look as silly as anything."

Sternweister flushed and then turned pale. He held hard to the edge of a table. "Go ahead," he said thickly.

"I am making an assumption that the people who robbed our bank started out from some hideout and then went back to the same one. I am further assuming that they were in their hideout some time, while they were planning the robbery."

Weed and Sternweister exchanged glances. "Go on."

"So my plan has certain possible flaws based on these assumptions, but at least it uncovers one possible pattern of investigation. I know that the car was stolen from Chapel Hill. That was in the paper. And I know the dead man was in Chicago. So I checked Chicago and Chapel Hill a little while ago."

"Checked them?"

"At the radio station, of course. Modern car radios are easy to set to new stations by altering the push buttons. The current settings of the push buttons do not conform either to the Chicago or the Chapel Hill areas. There are six stations that the radio in the Buick is set for and . . ."

Sternweister sat down on the couch as though somebody had clubbed him behind the knees. "Agh!" he said.

"So all you have to do," Pink said calmly, "is to check areas against the push-button settings until you find an area *where all six frequencies are represented by radio stations in the immediate geographical vicinity.* It will take a bit of statistical work, of course, and a map of the country, and a supply of push pins should simplify things, I would imagine. Then, after the area is located, I would take the Buick there and, due to variations in in-

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dividual sets and receiving conditions, you might be able to narrow it down to within a mile or two. Then, by showing the photograph of the dead gangster around at bars and such places . . ."

And that was why, on the following Wednesday, a repainted Buick with new plates and containing two agents of the Bureau roamed through the small towns near Tampa on the West Florida Coast, and how they found that the car radio in the repainted Buick brought in Tampa, Clearwater, St. Pete, Orlando, Winter Haven, and Dunedin on the push buttons with remarkable clarity the closer they came to a little resort town called Tarpon Springs. On Thursday morning at four, the portable floodlights bathed three beach cottages in a white glare, and the metallic voice of the P.A. system said, "You are surrounded. Come out with your hands high. You are surrounded."

The shots, a few moments later, cracked with a thin bitterness against the heavier sighing of the Gulf of Mexico. Mr. Stanley Woods, or, as the blonde later stated, Mr. Grebbs Fainstock, was shot, with poetic justice, through the head, and that was the end of resistance.

On Pink Dee Day in Leeman, the president of the Leeman National Bank turned over the envelope containing the reward. It came to a bit less than six percent of the recovered funds, and it is ample to guarantee, at some later date, a Cal Tech degree.

In December the Sternweisters bought a new car. When Claire demanded to know why Randolph insisted on delivery *sans* car radio, his only answer was a hollow laugh.

She feels that he has probably been working too hard.

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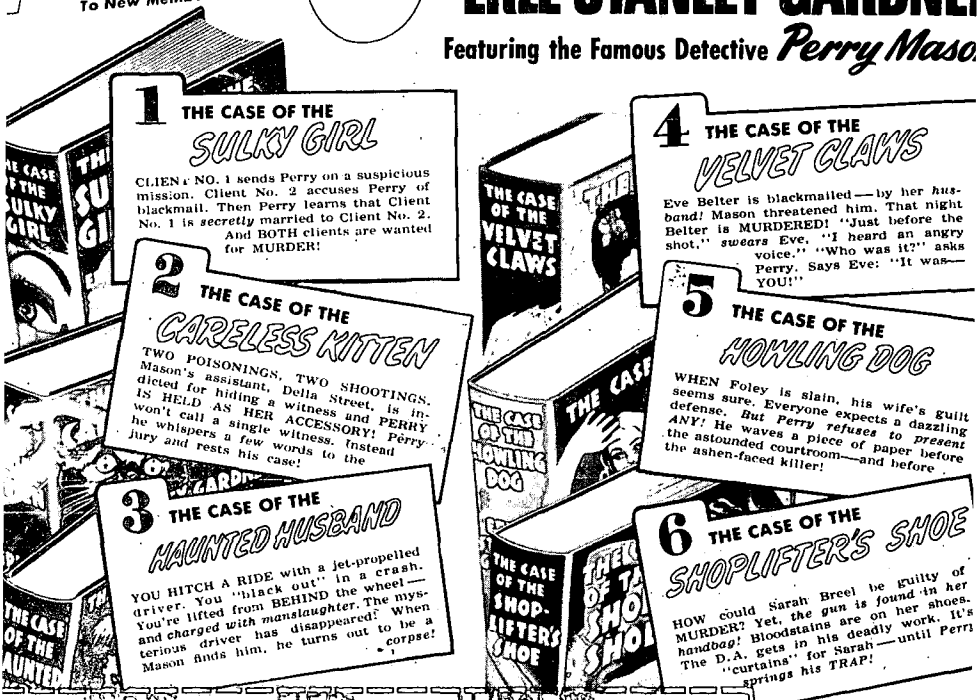

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